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THE

MAID OF FLORENCE;

OR,

NICCOLÒ DE' LAPI.

BY

THE MARQUIS MASSIMO D'AZEGLIO,
EX-PRIME-MINISTER OF SARDINIA.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY
W. FELGATE, A.M.

> Videbis, fili mi, quam parva sapientia regitur mundus.
> OXENSTIERN.
> Sunt lacrymæ rerum; et mentem mortalia tangunt.
> VIRGIL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

Their search was not long. Laodamia soon perceived that it was vain to hope for any result to their labours, and at once led Lambert back to the house. The latter had continued some time silent, internally agitated with a thousand fears and surmises; but at last, he could refrain no longer; and when he saw that they were retracing their steps, he laid his hand upon Laodamia, and said:—

"But am I not to know the meaning of all this mystery?"

"Oh, Lambert! I entreat you, let us first return to my poor father," replied Laodamia; and hurrying him along with her at a rapid pace, they reentered the house. The young woman knocked at Niccolo's door, calling her father to open it; and whilst he was slowly advancing to do so, she took hold of Lambert's hand, and with the most passionate entreaty, and almost with tears, said to him, in a suppressed tone:—

"Oh, don't say a word to vex him—my poor father!"

And when she heard the heavy step of the old man close to the door, she drew Lambert a little on one side, that her father might not see him all at once. At that moment the door opened. Niccolo, who still retained the marks of agitation caused by the appearance of Lisa, towards whom, in spite of his stern nature, he still felt the yearnings of a father's heart, displayed a countenance pale and wan, and his step was feeble and tottering. He thought that Laodamia had come to spend the remainder of the evening with him, as it was not yet late; and so, without saying a word, he returned and sat down again in his arm-chair in the chimney corner, and took up a prayer-book, in which he had been reading. Laodamia approached him, and assuming, as well as she could, an air of cheerfulness, said:—

"I have good news, father dear;—do you know who's just arrived, and is waiting outside?"

"Lambert?"—replied the old man, eagerly raising his head, and making a motion to rise up. "Oh, come, come, my son!" he exclaimed.

And Lambert, who was standing within hearing, was in an instant kneeling before him. Niccolo, taking hold of his head within his hands, pressed it to his bosom. Laodamia stood by; with clasped hands, and eyes raised to heaven, she prayed to God to aid them all three in this terrible emergency. Having remained thus for a minute or two, without speaking, Niccolo, loosing himself from Lambert, and placing one hand upon his forehead, looked at him with a fixed gaze. At last, with a suppressed sigh, he added—

"Thou hast no longer a child's face, lad. That is the face of a bold and gallant soldier;—that sunburnt countenance becomes thee well; and that scar, too, that seams thy cheek. Thou hast kept thy promise, Lambert;—but we——"

And here the old man, raising his thin and withered hands, shaded his eyes with them, and remained in that attitude, till he felt sufficiently composed to prevent him from giving vent to his emotions in tears.

"And we," he continued, "who thought to see thee again, and welcome thee back with joy, and to receive thee with open arms, and say—'Now, at last, thou art ours indeed!'—yes, I, who expected to greet thee with a calm, serene brow,—stand here before you—and it is the first time these ninety years, Lambert!—stand here as a culprit, compelled to confess his shame with his own lips! I could fain fall on my knees before you—but you would not allow it. Listen to me, Lambert, and be a man in spirit, as much as you are in appearance."

The poor youth, quite bewildered, still continued with one knee bent to the ground, gazing at the old man with looks of astonishment, and, it might be said, almost of alarm; for, from Niccolo's mouth, such language was terrible indeed, and foreboded the worst of evils.

"Sir Niccolo, you distract me with these dark intimations; speak out, in God's name, and have no fear for me."

"Well, then, know that I am disgraced! Lisa has deceived me—has deceived thee!—betrayed her family! her country!—"

Lambert started to his feet in an instant, and unconsciously clapped his hand to the hilt of his sword.

"By the eternal God, that cannot be!—You must be mistaken;—and whoever has told you this, lies in his throat!"

"Lambert," replied Niccolo, taking him by the arm, and seating him beside himself, "I, who speak to thee, am her father, thou knowest. Be silent, and listen.—Yes, Lisa has been a traitress to us all! From the stock of the Lapi, from the blood of Niccolo, has sprung a woman who could throw herself into the arms of a traitor—an enemy to this people and this city. Such has been the judgment of God upon this house—*Justus es, Domine, et rectum judicium tuum!*"

And here the poor old man was obliged to stop a moment, in order to recover himself. He then rose up, and going to a chest, which he opened, he took out a letter, and returning to Lambert, gave it to him.

"We were one evening preparing to go to bed: there was a ring at the gate; Ferruccio came in, and, on the part of the gonfalonier, gave me that letter;—read it."

Lambert proceeded to do so. His face, which before was ruddy, and with a fine bloom upon it, became by degrees quite white.

"And was all that really true?" he said at last.

"It was true."

And upon this, Niccolo related to him how, on going up to his daughters' apartment, he had found Lisa with her baby; and all the rest of her story, which the reader is already acquainted with, even to the latest events of that very evening. Lambert listened to the end, without interrupting him, or so much as giving any sign of what he internally felt; only the border of his coat of mail, as he sat, hanging down on his jambes, made a slight noise from time to time; the cause of which was the inward emotions, which agitated his whole frame. When Niccolo had finished speaking, they all three remained silent for some minutes.

Lambert, on entering the house with Laodamia, had taken from his servant a small knapsack, and the sword which he had received from Andrea Doria, and placed them upon the table by the side of Niccolo. He now rose up; and opening the knapsack, drew forth a gold chain, and then some documents, which were certificates of good service, all speaking highly in his favour, from Filippino and Andrea Doria; and a bill of exchange for the ransom of the Count d'Aguilar, whom he had taken prisoner at the battle of Salerno. He held the sword and the papers in his hand for a minute, and then flinging them all to the ground, he said, as he shook his head with a sad and bitter smile, which chilled poor Laodamia's heart—

"They cost me many a drop of blood! in God's truth, it has been spilt to some purpose!"

He next unfolded a small piece of paper, from which he took the stalk of a rose, all dry and withered, with a few shrivelled leaves; these he cast into the fire, where they were soon consumed, and said to himself, with a sigh: "Oh, that it ever came into my head to return to Florence!"——

Niccolo, hearing these words, rose up, and placing his hand on his shoulder, in a voice at once gentle and dignified, thus addressed him:—

"Lambert, are you not a Florentine citizen? Is not this your country, now threatened with a host of enemies? And can you regret having come to its defence? God knows whether I would, if I could, deliver you from your sorrow, which has only too just a cause;—would that Heaven had ordained my death, and not my dishonour! But who could set himself against the most High—against His will? The evil admits of no remedy! This evil is mine—'tis yours—'tis that of this family, and of a few private individuals;—and ought we to make any account of it—ought we even to think of it—when an infinite misfortune, a universal and impending ruin, threatens our country? Oh, Lambert, the old men, the women—even children—offer their feeble aid to join in the defence; and thou——"

"Oh, say not another word, sir, you pierce my very soul! It was but a moment; for, after all, our hearts are not iron! Yes, sir, yes, my father (for, in spite of my sad misfortune, I will never call you by any other name), this arm, this heart, belongs to Florence; my strength, my life, all do I dedicate to my country's service—to the defence of this city and our liberty. It was God's will that I should lose this joy—this delight of my life! Then, blessed be His holy name, since the greatest of all He has not taken from me, that of fighting and dying for the land of my birth—in defence of these walls, that enclose those who are dearest to me—those who are my friends and my brothers! From the battlements you shall see me fighting and falling, bathed in my own blood; and you shall say: 'Lambert has fallen like a brave man and a good citizen!' and I shall ever be cherished in your heart and in your memory. Oh, my father, I spoke like a coward! But to lose in a moment, what for so many years I had kept before my eyes, as the summit of happiness—which has been purchased with so many toils and hardships!——Oh, I am beside myself! Pardon me;—for indeed how many would account themselves happy—now I see!—how many would bless God, that they could give their life for their country, who are doomed to waste it ignobly away, and at last to end it uselessly and obscurely! Whilst I instead—God, I thank thee, I thank thee, O my Saviour, our King, that I am enlisted under thy banner! Speak no more of anything else, my father—not a word more. To fight, to conquer, or die for my country—for its liberty——"

It was with animated countenance and sparkling eyes that he uttered these words, at hearing which Niccolo embraced him with affectionate joy; and poor Laodamia, who had been all silence and attention, during their colloquy, found herself, without being aware of it, clasping in her own fair and delicate hands the broad and muscular hand of Lambert. Presently recollecting herself, she let it go; and a moment after, covered with confusion and blushes, she left the room, saying she was going to give directions for the servant and the horses to be taken care of.

The two others, left to themselves, sat down by the fire, when Niccolo proceeded to say:

"You have said well, Lambert; now is the time to think, not upon our own troubles, but upon our country's. But let us be of good courage; all that is taking place has been foretold by our venerated master; the heavier the scourge, the nearer the crown and the triumph—the more inevitable our destruction seems, the nearer our deliverance. When it looks as if all had abandoned or betrayed us, then will the power of the Almighty be displayed on our behalf!—then will His angels descend on these walls to defend them. So Father Savonarola predicted. Who can say he has ever once failed in what he has foretold? Let all the armies come, of Pope or Emperor—let all the hosts of the universe come—can they stand against the sword of a single seraph?—against that sword, which hurled Lucifer down into the abyss?"

Lambert who, without moving, kept his eyes on the fire, merely replied: "You say true," just to show that he was listening; but of all the old man had said, he had not really heard a single word. The thoughts that pressed on his mind, were too absorbing to allow of his giving any attention to anything else. He was saying to himself: "You left your poor old mother, aged and infirm as she was, with one foot in the grave, all for her—to gain her love, to win her hand. Now then, here thou art come back. Where is thy mother?—Dead. Where is thy Lisa?—Worse than dead!—she is gone to be the bride of a traitor! Oh, God is just!"

It was happy for the poor fellow, that he had parted from his mother with her consent, and that she had given him her blessing; had it been otherwise, he would have died from grief.

Niccolo, in the meantime, in order to divert his mind as much as possible from dwelling on his sorrows, and to animate him to the defence of the city, went on to say:

"But because God has promised us his help at last, we must not on that account be slack in helping ourselves, as far as our life and strength admit.

Everything has been provided for, and matters have been so contrived, that these invaders will not speed over well. They who boasted they would swallow Florence at one gulp, have not yet succeeded in taking the belfry-tower of San Miniato."

"Tell me, sir," interrupted Lambert, but the words died upon his lips. He wanted to inquire about his mother—to speak with him about her last moments; to learn whether she had uttered his name; whether, before she expired, she had desired to see him; whether she had blessed him—had appeared pained by his behaviour; whether she had forgiven his absence from her; and a hundred other things. But at the moment of giving utterance to the words, his courage failed him. There are some wounds of the heart so deep, so painful, and tender, that there is no method of treating them. Hardly does one venture to name them, or to refer to them; it seems as though those thoughts, already so distressing, when they press on the mind in the depth of its own reflections, if expressed in words, would become too great and overwhelming; and it is felt that, if increased only by a single degree, they would become too great for human endurance. He hesitated, therefore, a moment; and then repeating the words he had just used, but changing the direction of them he said: "Tell me, sir, do you know where your daughter is now?"

"You mean Lisa—for my daughter is Laodamia," replied the old man with a grave aspect.

"No, I don't know, nor do I want to know. You are aware, Lambert, that before I form a resolution, I think well of it; and when I have resolved, I never change. Now let us speak of Florence. Let us turn our thoughts to your affairs. Thou art a horse-soldier, I perceive, and well equipped as a cavalier. If you will listen to me, you will join D'Arsoli's troop. He is a brave man; his men are valiant, and we want cavalry to keep the passes open, and the country clear in the direction of Mugello, which the Marquis del Vasto's troops are scouring."

"I will do so. But—and he—Troilus, I mean, where is he?"

"He is in the enemy's camp.—Oh! what thoughts are now getting into your head? Would you?—do you not know that he is her husband? If you meet him in the battle-field, run him through with your sword—it is a lawful deed to do. But never fear, that 'll not happen—traitors are never to be found in the fight. But, come, my lad, forget all these things, and be a man, Lambert."

The young man clapped his hand on his iron cuisses, and bounded to his feet.

"You are quite right, Sir. Let us go then, and serve under D'Arsoli, and give our services where they are most wanted. But, by-the-bye!—I have not so much as asked after my brothers. What has become of Baccio?"

"Fallen in battle."

"And Bernardo?"

"Fallen in battle."

"And Bindo, and Vieri, and Averardo?"

"Defending the walls, and ready to follow their brothers, if God so ordain."

"Ah yes! let us follow them, and may God call me first; for to quit life, will be to escape from misery."

He was at this moment about to go; but the old man stopped him. He opened a chest, and taking out a bunch of keys: "These," said he, "are the keys of the house where thy poor mother, Nunziata, lived. But before you go there, first see Father Zaccaria, at St. Mark's. He has something to tell you of importance."

"Oh, my beloved mother!" exclaimed Lambert, as he took the keys, and pressed them to his lips; whilst two tears stole down his cheeks.

"Thy mother is in a better place than we are—and she died, blessing God, that she had in you, a brave and dutiful son."

"Is that indeed true?" asked Lambert, with emotion, and quite changed in appearance, by the sweet comfort imparted by these words.

"Yes, it is true, and Father Zaccaria, who confessed her, previous to the last sacraments, will confirm what I tell you."

"Oh! praised—blessed be God a thousand times, and that pure and holy spirit, which is now happy in his glorious presence!"

And so saying, the noble-hearted youth embraced the old man, shedding tears of joy, for he seemed as if restored to a new life.

Having remained thus for a moment, he loosed himself from Niccolo, and went out, without again turning round, while the old man said to him: "Remember that this house is your home, and when not on duty elsewhere, here is your bed. Now go, and let me see you again by-and-by."

Lambert bent his steps in the direction of St. Mark's; and though, just before, the mere asking after his mother caused him a degree of fear, now, on the contrary, quite changed by Niccolo's words, he was all impatience to see the person who could tell him about her, and satisfy his mind with respect to a thousand particulars, that he was eager to know. To look forward to the future, and find himself all alone without Lisa, and with the constant recollection of having been so cruelly forsaken, was a sad calamity; but yet, it was one of those misforunes, that do not crush, but sometimes rather serve to elevate a brave and noble mind. But to live on, for days, and months, and years, to grow old, and ever to have the feeling of remorse,—thy dying mother in vain sought thee beside her couch—in her heart she called thee undutiful—another closed her eyes, and laid out her cold limbs—this was a torturing thought, that he could not bear to dwell upon. And, indeed, what mind is hard enough to bear up against it?

Eager to escape from his suspense, and impatient to see the friar, who, he hoped, would relieve him of all his disquietude, he was soon at the convent gate. As it was so late, there was some difficulty in gaining admission; but, upon saying who he was, he was admitted; and, in a few minutes, he stood in the cell of Father Zaccaria da Fivizzano.

"It's I, it's Lambert!" he said to the friar, who was amazed at seeing a man clad in armour, rushing into his cell at that hour. "I arrived about an hour ago at Niccolo's house—I know all —Niccolo, poor old man, has himself told me all about Lisa.—Heaven has so ordained!—But I know also, that you have somewhat to tell me; that you closed my poor mother's eyes—forgive me for coming to trouble you at this hour—but my feelings would not suffer me to wait till to-morrow. Oh! give me some comfort, for I have need of it! Tell me that she blessed me, that she did not upbraid me as an ungrateful son, that she forgave my absence at such a time! Oh! speak, for the love of heaven!"

"Lambert," replied the friar, saluting him, "thou art a good youth, and these thy fears assure me of it. But calm thyself; she, of whom you ask, was a mother indeed, but a mother of a high and heroic spirit, who loved thee more on thy own account than on hers. Yes, she did bless thee, and far from thinking thy conduct unkind and undutiful, she told me she died happy, since she saw you on the road to become a brave and honourable man. If God, she said to me, sees fit to deny me the comfort of having him now at my bedside, perhaps it is best for us both; this final parting will be less painful; and God designs, by this means, to loose my thoughts from all earthly ties, that I may turn entirely to Him, and to the concerns of my soul. Two hours before she expired (it was in the evening, about dusk) she called me to her and said: 'Father Zaccaria, bring me that writing-desk, and sit here by my pillow, and write for me a few words, that I wish to communicate to my dear Lambert. I know him; he will need comfort on more accounts than one.' I wrote and sealed up the paper. She then added: 'I feel my breathing begin to fail; soon I shall not be able to speak any more; let the last breath that remains to me be spent for my dear son Lambert.' And extending her trembling hand, just as if you were kneeling by her bedside, and she placing her hand upon your head, she said: 'I pray Thee, God Almighty, to bless my son, even as I bless him; make him virtuous in this life, and happy in that which is to come.' She could say no more. Those were her last words, and she passed away calmly and peacefully."

Lambert wept like a child, as he listened to the friar's account. The good father gave him the paper, which the young man kissed a thousand times, and soon rendered moist with his tears.

"Weep on, my son," said the monk, who was himself not unmoved; "thou hast good reason for thy tears; weep on; no love is like a mother's love; and when death has extinguished it, no other can compensate us for its loss. But why do I say extinguished? It is become more pure, more intense, in communion with that infinite love, which looks down on this scene of things, which numbers our tears, only to change them, by-and-by, into so many joys. She loves thee now she is above, as much as she did, when on earth; and more, if it were possible; she pities thy sorrows, she accepts and welcomes thy tears."

"Ah! wretch that I was!" exclaimed Lambert, renewing his grief; "I ought to have foreseen all this; my poor mother let me go because—she thought only about me—to see me happy—but I ought to have thought of this—that to leave her thus, all alone, that her anxiety, her fears, on account of the dangers I was exposed to,—I ought to have known it, that she could not support this constant agitation and suspense, and that grief and worry would bring her to the grave!"

"Listen to me, Lambert. It sometimes happens that, in taking a resolution, we in some way fall into error. If you think you have done wrong, I would not endeavour to divert you from giving free vent to your remorse, and seeking pardon from Him, who knows our heart better than we do ourselves. But, from what I know of you and your venerated mother, and by that authority which is committed by the Church to her ministers, I enjoin you not to distress yourself further with these fears. I can give you assurance of what your mother's feelings towards you were; and in that letter you will find a better proof of it than in my words. Now then, calm yourself, and be at peace."

Lambert, all this time, impatient to read the letter, had approached the light, and was unfolding it to do so; but Father Zaccaria said to him:—

"Not now, my son; for it is not allowed for us to confer in the convent, at this late hour. And besides, maybe it will be better that you read it when alone. And when you have given due indulgence to these your natural feelings, suppress all thought of your own miseries, in presence of the great and noble thought of your country: she needs brave men, and those whose spirits are not softened by tears. Your strength, your life, now no longer yours, but your country's,—let them not uselessly waste away, whilst it is the time to use them in her service. Lambert! with arms in your hand, and facing the foe—there it is that God orders you; there it is thy mother from heaven points out your place! Fight and die for thy country's freedom; and you will render greater honour to her memory, than if you shed an ocean of tears. Oh! my son, God in his anger has remembered the sins of our fathers; the cry of our iniquities has reached up to his throne: they must be washed out—washed out with blood. Now go; for at this hour, no one from without may be seen within the convent walls; and you have already tarried too long."

The fiery words of the monk, so similar to those which he had just heard from Niccolo, and which seemed to be conveyed somewhat in a tone of reproof, caused the young man to raise his head. His countenance was flushed, as he seized the hand of the monk; and fixing his eyes on him, an angry flash seemed to cross his brow; but soon suppressing his emotion, he said: "I stood in need of your consolations, with respect to my poor mother. May God requite you, since your words have restored me to life again. With respect to my country, I am a Florentine, and, I may say, one of the Lapi! Farewell, good father: the rest shall be told you, in a few days, by somebody or other who has witnessed my deeds."

Thus saying, he went out. When he had regained the Square of St. Mark, he stopped, and raising his hands to heaven, said: "O God! I thank thee!" He seemed to feel as if he breathed more freely; his blood circulated more rapidly, and his limbs seemed more lithesome. But the letter he had in his hand he was eager to read, and quickly too; and to be alone, that no one might interrupt him. It was intensely dark (at that time there were no lamps in Florence; now-a-days, they are put out late in the evening, indeed, but lamps there are,—this is an age of improvement); he looked round, to see whether he could not catch the glimmer of some lamp burning before an image of the Virgin thereabouts, when he saw the rays of one which stands at the corner of the Via Larga, and which was there even at that period.

Although his heart was somewhat lightened by the friar's words, yet an internal voice did not cease to reproach him:—"Men absolve you," it seemed to say; "but God sees, that in your heart you had your doubts, as to its being right for you to leave your mother! You foresaw, as probable, what has really come to pass. And yet you left her!" He felt as if some atonement were needed; and the bitter grief arising from the thought of Lisa's faithlessness became changed, so to speak, into a source of consolation, as he thought to himself: "This punishment I well deserve!" and praying to God, he said: "If ever, for any mortal sin, my poor mother is detained among those souls, who are not yet admitted to the divine vision, receive my sufferings on her behalf; let me alone suffer here in this life, and make her happy in the other!" Then, as he thought on his letter, he hoped he might find in it some command, that was difficult and painful to execute; and, be it what it might, he resolved to fulfil it scrupulously, and even joyfully, with that enthusiastic impetuosity peculiar to a mind, that is incapable of making a compromise with its duty and its conscience; that cannot satisfy itself with palliatives, but is impelled, by its own nature, to seek in every action, whatever virtue holds out as most sublime and self-denying. It was the better and nobler part of his heart, that entertained these feelings and formed these resolutions; but in the other and weaker part, in which the passions still take refuge, though subdued, the image of his lost beloved was yet intrenched, as it were, ready to reappear whenever it saw the field unoccupied. He had by this time reached the lamp. He opened the letter, and began to read. It was to this effect:—

"It is now some months since I heard any tidings " of thee, but I am not afraid that thou hast happened of any harm. Thou wilt return, and thy " mother will be no more; since it is not God's " will, that I should expect to see thee, till I meet " thee in a better world: for this I hope of His " mercy. My life is now drawing to a close, my " words, therefore, must be few. Ever remember, " my son, that thy first duty is due to God and his " holy faith; thy second, to thy country,—in the " love of it every virtue is comprised, for virtuous " citizens, and nothing else, make the state powerful and prosperous. (These ideas, which may appear to the reader beyond the capacity of a plain countrywoman, had been impressed on Nunziata's mind in her intercourse with Niccolo's family.) " Ever cherish the memory of thy father and thy " mother, for they strove to bring thee up virtuously " and respectably, according to their poor means; " and, not being able to leave thee much wealth, " have left thee, thank God, a good name, so that " thou wilt never have to blush for them; and so " far as thyself art concerned, do thy endeavours, " that by thy conduct, their memory may be ever " well accounted of. If it be God's will, that you " rise to higher fortune, be not lifted up with pride, "but bear in mind that thou thyself art the son of "poor parents. Love and succour the poor, there"fore; and to the rich show due respect, and no "more. Of Lisa I have always formed my opinion, "which has been confirmed by what has come to "pass. From the first, thou know'st this love of "thine had not my approval, but I was unwilling "to give thee pain. Now heaven has set thee free "on that score; I know the grief it will occasion "thee, but I have a firm confidence, that all that "has happened will turn out to thy advantage. I "told thee too, that Laodamia was the fitter person "for thee. So, I do not command, but I advise "thee, and exhort thee as far as I may, to fix thy "love upon her. I pray God to make her thy wife, "nor could I wish thee any greater blessing. Fare"well, my dear son. Much more would I say to "thee, but my strength is failing me. I bless thee, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and "of the Holy Spirit."

"THY MOTHER."

And this signature she had, with great difficulty, succeeded in writing with her own hand.

What words could express the flood of feelings, that rushed into the heart of the poor young man at this moment? If thou, O reader, hast had a mother, who during her whole life has never had a thought but for thy happiness, has never studied anything but thy enjoyment; if she has been thy comforter, thy guide, thy counsellor, and if thou hast lost this mother, then thou needest not that it be explained to thee, what Lambert's heart must have felt on reading this letter. If on the contrary, God has not taken her away from thee, then no explanation will be sufficient. May this, the greatest of calamities, be long unknown to thee!

Midnight had sounded from the palace tower, and Lambert still remained fixed in the same spot, on his knees, and with his head resting against the wall. After weeping long and bitterly, and recalling how much tenderness and affection was conveyed in that letter, he felt the conflict of feelings that agitated his bosom gradually subside, and a peace and tranquillity diffuse itself over his heart, that was attended with sadness indeed, but yet was replete with resignation and comfort. Incapable a little before of reflecting or resolving on anything; now, on the contrary, by degrees, just as if a cloud had rolled off them, the faculties of his mind became clear and coherent. Of all his varied emotions, one alone remained vivid and powerful, that of following, in everything, his mother's counsels,—to give himself up to virtue, to his country, and to Laodamia.

But could he hope to offer her so speedily a free heart, and one worthy of her? He sighed as this doubt crossed his mind, for at that moment it was less possible than ever for him, to know himself, his feelings, and his desires. He saw before him a life of trouble and of hardship; but soon, dismissing all idea of ascertaining or enumerating his troubles, and being resolved to encounter them, whatever they might be, he found comfort at last in the consoling thought of fulfilling a sacred duty. He prepared himself to suffer, with that zeal and alacrity which religion alone can inspire, because *it* alone is sufficiently powerful over the human heart to persuade it, that suffering is a real good; *it* alone, instead of teaching man to shun pain and suffering, or to bear them with proud resignation and impatient submission, teaches him to rejoice in them, and to turn them into a benefit and a blessing; because, in a word, *it* alone is man's guide and guardian-angel in the dark days of his misery, and can justly boast of saving him from becoming useless or pernicious to humanity.

These were the sentiments that swayed Lambert's mind, and prevented him from resigning himself to despair, and rendered him, as we shall see, a brave and ardent patriot; because the men of that age, darkened though it might be with crimes and bloodshed, had not yet learned to refuse faith to everything but gold, and the pleasures that gold can purchase. They had, it is true, their excessive and immoderate feelings of hatred and of love; but it was just because they believed, that there were some things in the world, that merited the one or the other, in the degree they felt them. The poisoned breath of indifference and scepticism, admitted as a principle, had not frozen up their hearts; they could breathe freely and securely with respect to that faith, which they had chosen; they could sacrifice everything to follow it, and to aid its triumph; they could hold up their head and say: We believe that in the world, there are things higher, more excellent, and more valuable than wealth, or riches, or pleasures, without any fear that irony would respond with a sneer, or that their noble self-sacrifice would be received with the derisive laugh of scorn and pity.

Happy was it for Lambert that he did not come into the world three centuries later, and therefore, that he was not tempted to imitate certain heroes, whom modern literature sets before us as models of fortitude, of noble thoughts and great deeds. Assailed by a cruel misfortune, betrayed in his dearest affections, he would in that case have looked on life, as a voyage without a goal; virtue he would have deemed a sham, and the practise of it labour thrown away; he would have seen in humanity, a herd of vile wretched beings; in death the end of pain, and after death—nothing! Perhaps he would have committed suicide; perhaps he would have rushed like a wild beast on his fellow-creatures; would have become a fury, in order to revenge himself upon them; would have adored as his idol, the proud joy of trampling them under foot, and at last would have said to himself: I alone am noble, I alone am powerful in opposing calamity, I am the only man worthy of the name! But he had no such thoughts; for the age was then far distant, when poetry and philosophy were to extol as brave and magnanimous, the man who is the victim of his passions, and to denounce as weak and abject, him who subdues and vanquishes them.

Byron

CHAPTER II.

When Lisa had seen the gate shut in her face by her father—when her misery, her prayers, her tears, all had proved to be in vain, she turned away slow and disconsolate, after resting a moment on the steps, in the direction of the house where she had left her child. With her left hand she felt her way along by the wall, in her right she carried the few loaves, which numbered, so to speak, the remaining days of her life, and that of her child; and in a low voice kept repeating to herself, as she went along: "Oh! my crime must have been great indeed!"

Arrived at the door of her mean dwelling, she heard the cries of her poor little Arrigo joined to the low murmuring song of the old woman, who, unable to devise other means, was trying in this way to quiet it. Rushing up-stairs, she found her poor little famished child in Niccolosa's lap, which, with its tiny hands, was fumbling about her dress, opening its dry and parched lips, and seeking the breast.

She threw the cloth containing the bread on a table, took her baby in her arms, sat down, and in an instant nestled her child in her bosom, and found that she had just sufficient nourishment to appease its craving for a time.

"Oh! that my heart's blood," exclaimed the wretched mother, "could supply the place of milk for my darling."

The old woman, raising a corner of the cloth, and seeing the bread she had brought, said to her:—

"This is something, at any rate, thank God! But how long will it last? Oh! who has given it you? Where have you been? You went out in such a hurry."

"Home."

"And nothing more? Is this all?——"

"Nothing, nothing. I have no longer anybody in the world who cares for me, or will help me. Ah! but the father of my darling still lives. If I have to go through fire, I'll make my way to him. I will take him to him—he is his own flesh and blood—if Fanfulla will take me; and if not, I'll go alone. What harm can happen to me after all?—that I should be killed? And am I not dying here of want and misery, with my poor child, inch by inch?"

"You say true, my young lady; and in my poor opinion there's no time to be lost; if it is long delayed, the child will fall away so, that all aid will be in vain."

The two females remained silent for some minutes, whilst the child, becoming restless from finding it could get so little nourishment, would turn away its head with loud cries; and then again, its mother would succeed in soothing it for a short time; till after it had gone on for some time in this way, pining and crying, it relapsed into the convulsions, that had seized it in the former part of the evening. The premonitory symptoms of this fresh attack had already appeared, and Lisa set about trying to relieve it, exclaiming all the while, with tears in her eyes:—

"Oh, Holy Virgin, help me! See, the convulsions are returning. Oh! this time it will die; I'm sure it will. We shall not be soon enough,—let the apothecary be fetched—if he could but have an electuary!—Oh! pray, run."

"My good child, it's already past midnight; and Signor Nuto, at the corner, when he's once gone to bed, wouldn't get up for the Pope."

"But try, at all events, and may heaven reward you! Will you let this poor little thing die, without moving a finger for it?"

The old woman, who would not have stirred a step beyond her own door at that hour to gain a kingdom, stood still, without showing any inclination to comply with Lisa's request, and kept saying:—

"I fancy the little thing is getting better; you'll see, my dear, it will be nothing."

Lisa, who saw she could look for no help from her, and yet dare not leave her child at such a moment, rushed to the window, exclaiming:—

"Oh! is there no one passing by, who will help me?"

She looked into the street; it was all dark. She listened attentively; not a footstep was heard. She turned, with longing eyes, to the Madonna, which was only a few paces off, and there, beneath the lamp, as she looked intently, she could see something gleaming in the shade. She strained her eyes to see what it was, and perceived that it was a soldier on his knees, who appeared absorbed in his devotions.

"Oh!" she said, "he's a soldier; but there alone at his devotions, at this hour; he must be a good man." Raising her voice, therefore, she called loudly to him: "I say, my good man. Ho! soldier, come hither! so may God and the Holy Virgin help you. We are two women here, all alone with a child, who is like to die unless you aid us. God will requite you for your charity."

The soldier bounded to his feet at these sounds, with an alacrity that surprised Lisa; owing to the dark, she could not see him; but she perceived, by the sound of his footsteps, that he had approached close under the window, which was about nine feet from the ground. Feeling confident of his kind intentions, she implored him, with piteous accents, to run to the apothecary's, and bring back some medicine immediately, adding to her request a thousand expressions of gratitude and blessing. The soldier, without a word in reply, hastened away.

"He don't even answer me," thought the poor girl. "Is this a good or a bad sign?" And anxiously did she follow the sound of his retreating footsteps.

After a minute or so, hearing a furious knocking in the direction of the apothecary's house, she was satisfied that the soldier was going to do what he could for her.

The soldier was the kind-hearted Lambert, who had at once recognised her. In the first moment of surprise and displeasure, he felt disposed to reply to her: "What's a traitor's child to me?" but, checking himself, and listening to better counsels, he uttered this prayer in his heart: "O God! do thou forgive my mother all her sins, as I now forgive Lisa."

The apothecary appeared at the window half asleep, cursing the man who was making all this uproar in the street, and swearing, if he didn't be off, he'd make him smart for it. But seeing that the man who was knocking, was a soldier, and hearing him say: "If you don't open the door, you scoundrel apothecary, I'll batter it down for you," he became like a lamb, opened the door, and gave Lambert a cordial, which he assured him would have the desired effect. The latter was soon with it beneath Lisa's window, who no sooner heard him returning, than she was at the door to meet him, anxiously waiting for him.

"Oh! may God reward and bless you—My child is a little better;—but he may have a relapse.—My brave man, since your courtesy is so great, there is another favour I would ask of you. Go to the quarters of Arsoli's band;—ask for a trooper, who was formerly a friar in St. Mark's, of the name of Fanfulla; tell him to come to me, for the love of God, at break of day, as I want very particularly to see him."

So saying, she took the phial, and in so doing, observed that the soldier's hand shook. She could not see his face, as his vizor was down, but she could discern two dark brown eyes, which were fixed on her in a manner, that excited her apprehensions; and in the hollow of his helmet she could hear him draw his breath fast and heavily.

She paused for a moment, an idea flashed across her mind;—this trembling! this attempted concealment,—could it be Troilus! who being looked upon as an enemy in the city, and perhaps afraid there might be other people in the house, was unwilling to discover himself. She turned to look at him more closely, to judge of his height; and all seemed to correspond. Oh! he has then thought of me, and our darling Arrigo. My love has not been in vain—it is he, I am sure; and at last, with tearful eyes and trembling voice, she said to him—

"Tell me, I pray you, to whom I am under such great obligations;—at any rate raise your vizor,—speak, good youth. Oh! do speak, I think, I have already guessed;—my heart tells me I am not mistaken; you may speak without fear, we are quite alone—I and a poor old woman—in this house, you have nothing to be afraid of."

And she was so carried away with this idea; that no longer doubting the fact, she said in a low tone, but in accents full of joy and ecstasy—

"Ah! yes, it is Troilus! Thou'st thought of thy poor Lisa, eh?—I knew it.—I never doubted thy fidelity, or thy love, you know! oh, speak, pray do, speak! you almost distract me—"

She saw the soldier raise his hand to his vizor, and lift it slowly, slowly up; when a pale countenance met her eyes, which at first she did not recognise; so that she started back in alarm, quite terrified.

"Heaven grant that Troilus may never give you cause to doubt his fidelity;" said the young soldier: "but yet, he is now fighting against his country. He who has just rendered you this small service, is Lambert."

Lisa, at these words, caught hold of the door post, to save herself from falling. When she was about to speak, she found herself alone.

The next day, early in the morning, Fanfulla knocked at the door. He found her still suffering from the effects of her recent agitation, caused partly by her fears for her child, and partly by the unexpected appearance of Lambert. As soon as she saw the good man, who, with so much tenderness, had assisted her, in her greatest need, after many grateful expressions, she disclosed to him her intentions, declaring that she could, in no wise, endure her present life any longer, and that she desired, at all hazards, and by any means, to make her way to the camp, and place herself and her child under the protection of Troilus. She begged Fanfulla would be her guide, notwithstanding that he vainly tried to convince her of the dangers to which she would be exposed; amongst which, he considered the greatest would be (though he did not say so to her) that of being repulsed by Troilus; for he was generally thought a scamp, and he deemed it likely, that he would use every means to evade the performance of his duty. All the eloquence, all the entreaties of Fanfulla were vain: and when, as a last attempt, he told her, that in no case would he accompany her (he did not know what a spirit this poor girl possessed), she, without making any ado, but rendering due thanks for all his care and kindness on her behalf, merely said to him—

"Well, farewell; and may God bless you. I will go by myself."

Fanfulla, who had spoken in this way, only to divert her from her purpose, and who sooner than abandon her in danger, would have given his life for her, heaved a sigh, as he repeated his favourite phrase:—"I'm sure to come in for my share of troubles," and then added—

"My good girl, I'm at your service, all the world over."

They then began to concert measures for getting out of the city, and making their way to the camp. As for egress, there was no difficulty on that point; for the gates on the right bank of the Arno were left open, but it was necessary to find some means of crossing the river, and then to gain admission into the camp, in such a way as to guard the poor girl from the licentiousness of the soldiery; of whom such tales were told, that from all the country round about, the inhabitants had fled away.

"I," said Fanfulla, "had best put on my friar's gown, and under it, my trusty arms; and you, my little girl, if you could get hold of a nun's dress,—and we would tell the guard, that we are going to beg for alms for the convent; and then—But, by-the-bye!—the child—nuns with a baby in their arms, that's quite out of the question; and for friars, much more. We might say, we had found it in the street.—Eh! no, no; that's a lame story. Let me see: suppose you could get a friar's robe,—one of the novice's,—eh! but confound it,—there's always this child! Plague upon it, that friars haven't wives!—But in the third place, suppose we dress ourselves up as gipsies? then we may have as many babies as we please. Yes, yes, that's the plan. They go everywhere, and no one interferes with them. Leave me to manage matters; I'll find somebody to lend me an old torn jacket, and I'll get a guitar; and do you rout about, and find some rags to put on; a bundle tied to your back, you must have; and to this pale, fair face of yours, you must give a darker tinge, and your little hands also; for in order to play off upon soldiers, I can tell you, one must have a long head. Now then, my little Miss, keep up your spirits, I'll take you some how or other. About six this evening, I shall be here to convey you away; and in an hour or two, please God, we'll manage this affair. So now, till we meet again."

Fanfulla, with this, went away to go in search of a fisherman, whom he prevailed on to moor his boat a mile higher up than the gate of San Niccolo, where he was to wait for them, to transport them to the other side.

At the hour appointed, he was with Lisa. Having put on a coat of mail, with steel gauntlets, and with a dagger and a short sword at his side, he covered these arms with an old thread-bare coat; and on his head he placed a hood, with large folds, which hid from view a steel cap that was underneath; and thus, bidding adieu to Niccolosa, they set out, as the sky was now becoming dark. They sallied forth by the gate of La Croce, and turning to the right, arrived at the banks of the Arno, which owing to the rains was very much swollen; and following the shore, they went silently along, in an opposite direction to the current. Every now and then they came to places, where it was difficult to get along; more than one rivulet which ran into the Arno, threatened to stop them. In such cases, the good Fanfulla took the girl in his right arm, and the baby in his left, and walking through the water with slow and cautious steps, he conveyed them to the other side.

"What a deal of trouble you have on our account!" said Lisa, moved by the kindness of the good man; whilst he, who, during fifty-three years of a life, that had been agitated by a thousand changes and chances, had never known what it was to be melancholy (except lately, when he was an inmate of St. Mark's) replied—

"Eh! Madonna, to damage my skin, requires something more than a few buckets of water and a little mud. I, look you, am like asses, who droop in the stable, and in order to spirit them up a bit, all that is wanted is work and blows."

Presently, seeing that she was tired and exhausted, he tried to encourage her by saying—

"You, who have scarce ever been from your daddy's side, maybe, think it a great matter to travel by night in this way, through such places; but don't be alarmed, you are with one who would defend you against a hundred. As for hardships, —why, whoever is not yet dead must have them; they fall to the lot of all; and I, who know something on't, can tell you, that just when it seems that the world is tumbling about our ears, the wheel goes round in a twinkle, the wind changes, and we're all right."

Here Lisa, who was now with difficulty dragging her feeble steps along, requested she might rest for a minute; and sitting down on the ground, she turned her eyes, which glistened with a tear, towards Florence, from which they were now distant rather more than half a mile. The sky, along which floated the clouds, thin and fleecy in the upper regions, but which became thicker towards the horizon, was feebly illumined by the new moon, which was now going down. It appeared of a reddish hue, and rayless, only a little higher than the towers and edifices of the city, which had the appearance of a dark and craggy mass, without a single light breaking the uniform darkness, and not a voice or sound of any kind recalling the idea of life; a poet, perhaps, would have said, that the city was sitting pensive and sad, at the thought of her impending ruin. Only the dull and distant sound of falling waters, as they rushed along down the sluices of the mills, that adjoined the Serristori Palace, smote upon her ear, and filled her heart with a sense of inexplicable dread, of which the distressing and anxious thoughts that agitated her, were, by turns, cause and effect. So long as she remained in Florence, though driven from her home, she had felt that she was still united by some tie, both to it and her family; she could still look upon a reconciliation as possible. Now it appeared as if, by her departure, she had severed the last link that bound her to her family, to her country, to the friends of her youth, to those dear and life-long recollections of spots, that had witnessed the purest joys, and the transient sorrows of her life. Reared up in sentiments of patriotism, trained from her youth to detest her country's enemies, and with the harsh denunciations still sounding in her ears, that her father and brothers were wont to hurl against all, who set themselves in opposition to the doctrines of the friar Savonarola, and to their political liberty, she could not, in spite of her love for Troilus, either efface from her heart the early impressions of her childhood, or eradicate those feelings which she had all her life regarded as sublime and holy; and which love had triumphed over, but not destroyed. She now felt that to her father she was a rebellious and undutiful child; to her country, an enemy and a traitor; she felt pursued by the curse her father had pronounced upon her, and by that of all her virtuous fellow-citizens, who remained within those walls to fall by famine or the sword. As she looked towards the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, in which she had been accustomed to personify, as it were, the idea of the popular party and the liberty of Florence, she seemed to see an avenging form that was marking her flight, and destined soon to overtake and visit her with some new and more terrible calamity.

If, turning her mind away from these mournful ideas, she endeavoured to cheer it with the thought of soon seeing Troilus; even then her hopes were marred by a doubt, which she would not allow in her heart, but which obstinately forced itself on her thoughts, and was ever saying—"Are you sure of his constancy? Are you sure he will welcome you? Can you really confide in his love, who, now for more than a year, has not so much as written to you, nor made any inquiries concerning your welfare?"

This distressing suspicion so worried her, that she was obliged to rise up, and continue her journey, unable any longer to endure such a state of uncertainty, and eager to know the real truth as soon as possible, be it what it might. After a while they lighted on the boat, and getting in, not without some difficulty, owing to the force of the current, they were landed on the other side. Quitting the boat, they resumed their way along the bank, making for the back of the hill, on which stood the mansion called La Bugia, at that time the property of the Guicciardini. When Fanfulla thought they had gone far enough in that direction, leaving the river, they turned to the right, and crossing the road to Arezzo, they proceeded through the olive groves, in order to ascend the acclivity of the hill. His design was from thence to descend into the Val d'Ema, and re-ascend to Saint Marguerite à Montici, a little church, where the bands of Sciarra Colonna were posted, not far from the plain of Giullari, which might be called the centre of the encampment, as being the quarters of the Prince of Orange. It seemed probable that Troilus, as a man of rank and one of the prince's body-guard, would be there; or, at least, it would be easy to gain tidings of him there. But the nearer they approached to the end of their journey, the more did Fanfulla feel assured, that it would prove after all, nothing more than making a hole in the water. When they arrived at the spot from whence they had only to surmount the last ridge, in order to gain the chapel of St. Marguerite :—"Come," said Fanfulla, "let us halt here a moment; and rest yourself a while, as this going up and down hill must have tired you not a little. And since, thank Heaven, we have not encountered any body yet, let us now do our best, to come off in our adventure with flying colours."

With this, he drew forth from his pocket a loaf and a bottle of wine, and setting them before his companion, said—

" This will revive your spirits a bit."

" You have thought of everything!" said Lisa, who, not used to these hardships, felt herself quite done up; and taking a mouthful of bread, she followed it with a draught of wine; nor could this refreshment have been offered to her at a more opportune moment.

But Fanfulla was not satisfied with restoring a slight degree of vigour to her body; he would have much preferred, if he could, to fortify her mind, and prepare her for the possibility, that Troilus might either absolutely refuse to receive her, or do it in such a manner as would amount to the same thing. He was revolving in his mind how to open the matter, and at last said—

" I'll tell you what I am thinking about. When we get near St. Marguerite's, you shall remain concealed among the olive-trees, and I'll go forward, and when I've found him, I'll bring him to you; but—it's better for me not to tell him who you are—and besides, you must be prepared—you know soldiers on active service have every day a thousand vexations. Suppose in the skirmish, for instance, some matter has gone amiss, why, may be, he's out of sorts—he's a little irritable—I have found it so myself—but you must not think anything of it. Probably he may take it ill, that you have exposed yourself to all these risks and hardships with such a young baby; he may say a harsh word to you; well, be patient, and take it as it comes—for, let me tell you, that to stand every day, and all day, with so many pounds weight of iron on one's back, in the cold and rain, and amidst a thousand discomforts, makes one's manners rather rough. But to you, with your gentle winning ways, it 'll not be hard for you; and besides, I may be deceived, but I hope, nay, believe, that he'll hardly fancy it can be true, to meet you again after such a long time."

And he added, in an under-tone to himself—"Only let me get you outside the camp, and then if you don't come to your senses, I know how to bring you to them." And such was his regard for Lisa, such pity did he feel for her misfortunes, that he vowed to himself, in case matters should come to extremities, that he wouldn't let Troilus trifle with him; and he was not one likely to fail in his determination.

They continued their way; and after half an hour's toiling up hill, being within a gun-shot of St. Marguerite's, Fanfulla thought it time to stop; he discovered a hedge, that would serve very well for a hiding-place, and there he designed to leave Lisa, opening a passage for her through it with his hands in the thickest part. Amongst the shrubs were many brambles, which, owing to the darkness, he could not perceive, except when he felt them prick his fingers; but the worst of it was, that one of these brambles, when he withdrew his hand, with which he held it aside, springing back, struck the child on the cheek with considerable force. Till now, Fanfulla had generally carried it, and the motion had lulled it to sleep; but when scratched by the thorns, it woke up, and began to cry with all its might. They both placed their hands upon its mouth in all haste; but partly from their care to avoid suffocating it, partly because it writhed and twisted itself about so, they could not prevent its voice from being heard in the tents of the Colonna.

Fanfulla, looking up, presently saw moving and hurrying in all directions several lights, like so many glow-worms among the olive-trees; and as he was well acquainted with these matters, he perceived they were soldiers with the lighted matches for their arquebusses, coming in the direction from which the cry proceeded. Their footsteps, and the sound of the voices, soon told they were not far off; and a Spanish soldier, in front of the rest, was shouting out with a hoarse laugh—

"Hold there, I'll give that youngster such a lullaby, that it 'll not wake till the day of judgment, I promise you."

"Stop!" cried another, "let's see, may be it's some great lady of this part of the country, who is running away; and I should much rather see her florins, than this little scaramouch's brains."

Had Fanfulla been alone, he would very soon have decided what was to be done. He would have rushed, head down, between them, his sword in his right hand, and his dagger in his left, and then, adieu and good-bye, he would quickly have been out of their clutches; or else, on his way to the next world. But on the present occasion, it was necessary to go to work more cautiously. He, therefore, said to Lisa, who was drawing her child closer to her bosom, and recommending her soul to God:—

"Don't be afraid, but leave me to manage this business." Then turning to the Spaniard who had first come up, he said: "*Detengase, señor,* (the Italian soldiers of that day almost all spoke Spanish, for the same reason that, five-and-twenty years ago, they spoke French)—*Detengase,* stop, Signor, we are poor gypsies, and are on our way to the camp, to play our music and entertain your worshipful company! We are poor now, but we were rich but a moment ago,—we had then a purse containing florins, and some German soldiers, who were roving about, have robbed us of them,—the villains have dusted my back with their halberds, and they have given this poor young woman such a sturdy buffetting, that they have not spared even this little one. There, there they go, see, amongst the trees; I see 'em, they are making off at full speed. Overtake them, catch them, I pray you, and you shall have as much of the contents of the purse as you please."

The soldiers approached, and examining, as well as the darkness would permit, the poor garments of Fanfulla and the female who was with him, and having taken hold of the guitar at his belt, they gave credence to his tale. He, all the while, feigning to be in a mighty passion, urged them speedily to follow the track of the men who had robbed him; and kept pointing down the declivity, among the olive-trees, and declaring he could distinguish them still.

"Make haste, lads, for Heaven's sake! you'll certainly catch 'em. The one who has clutched my purse, that you may know him, is a little, thin man; he wears his belt, but is without his musket, and there are, in all, not more than five or six."

In pointing out the direction, in which he said he could see these soldiers, he was careful to select that, which was away from the road he designed to take, as soon as he could get free. Aware of the jealousy and hostility, that existed among the various nations of which the imperial army was composed, the soldiers of which could not approach one another's quarters without creating disputes amongst themselves, he thought it a good manœuvre to saddle this act of plunder on the Germans.

We notice this, that the reader may judge whether Fanfulla was so witless, as his enemies would have us believe. In fine, the soldiers fell into the snare. It is true, that for all their looking among the trees, they could not discover any moving thing, or anything that had the shape of a man; but they thought, perhaps this fellow has better eyes, or is like a cat, that can see in the dark. In a word (and all this took place in less time than one could say an Ave Maria), they all made off, rushing one after the other down through the olive grove, shouting and swearing with terrible oaths, that if they could only clutch those German knaves, they would hew them to pieces.

"Oh, those cursed robbers! They come as far as this, do they, on their plundering expeditions! —right within the lines of our camp!"

And hurrying along, they were soon at a distance, beyond sight or sound; and Fanfulla, now breathing freely, laughed and said—

"A fine chase, my merry lads, for you! Now, my good girl, we'll be off, before they come back."

Poor Lisa, more dead than alive, from the fright of this encounter, but yet feeling the necessity of getting to a place of safety while there was time, came forth from the hedge, and, with difficulty standing on her feet, set out, supported by Fanfulla, who carried the child, which was now become quiet. Changing his first intentions, he resolved to keep as near as possible to the plain of Giullari, and to the mansion of the Guicciardini, at that time tenanted by the Prince of Orange; and, as it pleased God, they succeeded in arriving without further accident at the foot of the wall of one of the nearest houses. There was no hedge here, but heaps of hay and stubble, behind which Lisa could hide; and this time she was particularly careful, to prevent anything touching or hurting her child.

Fanfulla, having once more endeavoured to cheer her up, left her to go in search of Troilus; and gaining the road, he soon reached the little market-place, in the centre of the village. This market-place was in the form of a triangle, surrounded on two sides by labourers' cottages; the third was occupied by the front of the little church, the only one in that district; in the middle was a well, covered with a roof; and on one side was erected a beam with a pulley, forming a gallows, from which, few days passed, without some unfortunate wretch dangling in the air; some countryman detected conveying provisions into Florence; some spy; or sometimes a soldier, who had been guilty of a breach of discipline; for to attempt to keep an army in order in those days, it was often necessary to have recourse to the halter; nor had military *etiquette* as yet established the rule, that death by hanging was ignominious, but to be shot left a man's honour unimpaired. But we must pity the poor, unenlightened people of the sixteenth century: perhaps they entertained the idea, that the shame was in the crime—not in the punishment.

This market-place, through which at the present day one may walk at any hour, and meet only some quiet, country people, who greet you in their correct and harmonious language, or little companies of people who dwell in the neighbourhood;—those cottages, that now-a-days present the image of quiet and contented poverty; those lowly doors, around which children of all ages are seen clustering, and young girls, engaged in the neat and useful occupation of plaiting straw;—all, at the moment of Fanfulla's arrival, was filled with men of other lands, and was a scene of universal noise and disorder. The streets were all mud and dirt, and broken up by the constant traffic of men and horses; the houses filled with soldiery, the walls besmeared and filthy with smoke; the church turned into a canteen, and the open space covered with booths, beneath which were sutlers, selling bread, meat, wine, and other things, and who had erected their shop in this locality, with no small discretion, knowing that the sight of the gallows was the best treatise on mnemonics, for those customers who might otherwise forget to pay.

Whilst Fanfulla was looking about, to see whom it would be best to apply to, to gain information respecting Troilus, he heard a slight commotion among the people, and perceiving a crowd in the neighbourhood of the gallows, he approached, and saw a man mounting a ladder that was placed against it, and adjusting a halter and all that was necessary for an execution. Curiosity induced him to watch the proceedings, and he observed close by, the person who seemed to be the victim, for whom the gallows was preparing. It was apparently a woman, with her hands tied behind her back, who, kneeling at the feet of a Capuchin friar, was making her confession. Fanfulla was surprised, that they were going to hang a female; but his wonder increased, when, from beneath her garments, the sheath of a sword was seen protruding. At the moment when he was about to inquire, what the charge against her was, he saw an officer approach, who, making his way through the crowd, went up to one of the soldiers who was guarding the prisoner, and asked him, why they were going to execute the young woman.

"Say, rather, the young man," replied the soldier, laughing. "It has been rather a strange affair—I was not present myself, but Fruga here, was. He is himself a Florentine, and says he knows the younker, and all his family. He is the son of a Piagnone, a silk-mercer."

"Well, but what has he done?" said the officer, impatiently.

"Oh, they say he has attempted to kill somebody or other—Troi—Trojanus—never mind about his name, an officer who is about the prince's person. It seems the gentleman has been playing the gallant to the lad's sister; and he, to take vengeance on him, came to the camp at dusk, dressed like a woman, and remaining in some retired spot, sent a lad to the gentleman, telling him that a young girl wanted to speak with him;—the cunning fellow!—that his suspicions might be lulled, and so he might come alone. Well, he came; but at a short distance behind, he had four soldiers. No sooner had he lighted on the person he thought a female, than he was saluted by the words—'Draw, and defend yourself, traitor!'—The gentleman clapped his hand to his sword, and with difficulty parried the thrusts made at him; when his men rushing forward, came behind the youth and pinioned his arms, and now the hangman is preparing a new-fashioned gorget for him."

The officer shaking his head, and shrugging his shoulders, as if to say, "Oh! is that all?" went about his business.

Fanfulla's attention was arrested by the circumstance, for he had no doubt (though he had not been able to catch the names) that this affair was somehow connected with Lisa; and, to be sure, there at the foot of the gallows stood poor Bindo, preparing like a good Christian for his last journey.

CHAPTER III.

The same evening that Lisa, amid so many difficulties and dangers, quitted Florence to go in search of Troilus, he was passing his time, gaily and unconcerned, in the Guicciardini villa, at supper with the Prince of Orange, and a host of generals and persons of distinction, who there spent their time in diverting themselves, whenever their military duties did not call them elsewhere. They found there a well-spread table, cards and dice, and such other amusements as the place and time admitted of. Although, in consequence of the scanty supplies furnished by Clement VII., a great want of money was experienced in the army; and the soldiers, from not receiving their pay with any regularity, were constantly living in a state of comparative starvation, and often broke out into open insurrection; yet the officers had sufficient tact to arrange matters so, that they themselves, at any rate, did not suffer either hunger or thirst, but always had a well-provided table. On this point of military tactics, it would seem that all great soldiers have been of one mind, both before and since the invention of gunpowder; and the Prince of Orange, who, at the early age of twenty-six, was one of the bravest and most able of those recorded in history, was not, even on this point, inferior to the rest.

The country mansion of the Guicciardini, which is in good condition even to the present day, is situated on the road, which leads from the plain of Giullari to St. Marguerite à Montici. It consists of two piles of building, two stories high, square and rather low; two embattled walls unite them, leaving a space between, which serves for a court-yard. In the wall towards the road is the great gate, with its arch and columns reaching to the first story. The windows of the ground floor, arranged in just and elegant proportion, and at suitable distances in the Bramantesco style, are defended with strong iron bars, which extending from the cornice above, rest on a large projecting stone, supported by two brackets. In the pile of building on the left hand as you enter the great gate from the street, were the apartments of the prince, with those of his staff and pages; on the right were those of his servants, with the baggage and the horses.

In the court, which was lighted by the red glare of torches, were many vases and pots containing shrubs and fruit-trees, which had been conveyed thither, to save them from the hatchet of the soldiers, and now served as racks for the halberds of the men on guard at the gate, outside of which, along by the wall, stood several horses, saddled and bridled, which the grooms were holding, waiting for their masters, who, enjoying themselves with drinking and playing, in well furnished apartments, all splendidly lit up, were as much concerned for the suffering, the cold and misery which their men and horses endured, as an English lord cares for a hired carriage, which is waiting for him at the door of the opera, when the temperature is below the freezing point.

Supper ended, and the tables cleared, cards and dice were introduced. The prince, dressed in a cloak of crimson velvet, lined with fur, beneath which he wore only a doublet and breeches of buckskin, in order that he might put on his armour expeditiously, on any sudden emergency, was playing at lansquenet with Don Ferrante Gonzaga, the Count de San Secondo, Pier Luigi Farnese, and a dozen other Spanish and German officers. There lay before him a heap of gold florins, of which he staked a handful at every game, and however fortune decided, his countenance always retained the same stern and impassive expression; for the laws of chivalry, and the maxims then in force among the nobility, required them to play for large stakes, to lose with the utmost indifference, and to pay without delay.

In order to observe these laws, on one occasion, as we are told by Varchi, he was under the necessity of giving to his companions at play, the money which Clement had sent him, for the pay of the troops. The soldiers were dying of hunger, but the debt of honour was satisfied. Between two evils, we must always choose the least!

In the dining-hall some, either seated on large arm-chairs, or pacing backwards and forwards, were chatting and laughing; talking of the chace, of love, of feats of arms, of disputes and duels. In an adjoining apartment, several young men were practising fencing, and just at that moment, standing round in a ring, they were watching a contest with sword and poniard between Troilus and Alexander Vitelli. They showed about equal skill, but the former was thought, by the greater part, to have rather the best of it.

Along the seats and on the tables lay in a confused heap, the caps, helmets, gauntlets, swords, and other weapons, belonging to the guests. From the wall, which was painted al fresco, and divided into compartments, containing historical representations, hung suspended, arms, flags, banners, and warlike accoutrements of all kinds; but the nails which supported them, being driven through the paintings, without any consideration, had entirely defaced them.

On one side was a spacious and lofty fireplace; the mantelpiece projected a considerable distance, and rested on two figures of huntsmen, which were supported against the columns, holding a horn to their mouths; the cornice which they sustained with their head and arm, was ornamented with beautiful foliage, with figures of animals and curious heads; and above, two nymphs, in a recumbent posture, held up between them a shield, on which was depicted the three horns, the device of the Guicciardini.

A man of middle stature, who exhibited in his general aspect a premature old age, was seated by the fire; alone and in deep thought, he seemed unconscious or regardless of the laughter and the uproar around him. He had on the Florentine lucco and hood, and with his elbow resting on one of the arms of the chair, and supporting his cheek on his closed hand, he was intently gazing on the quivering flames; and according to the nature of the thoughts that weighed on his mind, at one moment he contracted his eye-brows, at another slowly shook his head; now and then a slight smile curled his lip, but it was a smile that expressed any emotion but that of joy. This man was Baccio Valori, the papal commissary in the Imperial army; a man of subtle and ready talents, well versed in affairs of state, greedy of power, and regarded as a most astute politician. He found himself, however, after the lapse of a long life, obliged to acknowledge, that the most profound sagacity consists in being an honest man; since he lost his head at last beneath the axe of Cosmo I.

On the success of the enterprise against Florence, depended the fulfilment of his ambitious hopes, or his total ruin. If the city were taken, and subjected to the Medicean yoke, he would rise to the highest rank, and would obtain riches and honours; he would then be esteemed a good and prudent man, the friend of order and the laws! If, on the other hand, the people of Florence prevailed, and maintained their liberty, in that case he was left an outlaw and an exile, stripped of his possessions, and reduced to the abject condition of a disappointed traitor. For success, the difficulties were many and considerable. It was his interest to keep the troops well provided with provisions and munitions of war; whereas, on the one side, the pope was averse to a liberal expenditure; and on the other, the prince was, as we have seen, not a very good steward, even of the small subsidies that were reluctantly furnished by the apostolic chamber. Besides, in the mind of Clement VII. there resided a suspicion, that the ultimate object of the Prince of Orange was to make himself master of Florence, on his own account; and Baccio was charged to keep a sharp eye on him, in order, if need were, to counterwork his machinations. And last of all, the party of the Piagnoni, who, it was expected, would be panic-struck merely by the approach of the army to the walls, were now found, on the contrary, to be so emboldened, and so resolute for the defence, as to inspire reasonable doubts of the result of the war.

Considering it a most important point to have some one in Florence, who day by day might keep him informed of the plans of the hostile party, he had used his utmost exertions to maintain a secret correspondence with several Palleschi; but from these, who were objects of suspicion to the government, he received but little information, and that so tardily, that it was of little or no service to him. Troilus, indeed, would have answered his purpose admirably; for, if he but succeeded in gaining an entrance into Niccolo's house, and winning his confidence, he would be, so to say, in the very heart of the Piagnone party, and in a position to become thoroughly acquainted with their most secret thoughts and designs; but he placed but small reliance on him. Although he had promised Malatesta to lend himself to this scheme, as we saw in Chapter VI., and had not disavowed his purpose even to Baccio himself, yet he seemed anything but anxious for its execution. One time he pleaded one excuse, at another time, another; he suggested a thousand difficulties, and could not make up his mind to exchange his life in the camp, which, if at times, somewhat hard, was yet one of freedom and enjoyment, and seasoned with the pleasures to be found at the prince's quarters, for a dull and melancholy existence in a besieged town, with nothing but sermons, processions, and austerities; and where too, it would be his lot, to take up his abode in a family, which was the most rigid in its observances, and under a man the most austere, and the strictest of the Piagnone party.

If, then, Baccio Valori, with so many thoughts in his head, and, from having continually to contend with so many different tempers, passed an anxious life, and kept to himself, all alone, brooding over his cares, without sharing the joys and diversions that surrounded him, it is not to be wondered at; rather, we may thank God, that in this world, more toil and pains are often required to be a scoundrel, than would make many an honest man.

Just at this moment, having finished their friendly assault of arms, a crowd of young men made their way into the hall; and, full of their fun, came rushing and shouting towards the fireplace; and as they passed, they heedlessly, in the midst of their tricks, knocked against the chair on which Baccio was sitting. He turned round angry and grumbling, whilst Troilus, approaching him, said, laughingly :—

"Don't be angry, Sir Baccio, and pray drive those thoughts out of your head; for I declare, your face becomes a yard longer every day. Don't you know, that a hundred pounds of sorrow won't pay an ounce of debt?"

"You are a great ass, and if you attended to something else besides these fooleries, 'twould be the better for thee. Now just sit down here a moment; for you must be tired, after your freaks and fighting."

"Tired? never, Sir Baccio; and if you will have a turn or two with me with your rapier, you will soon see whether I am or no."

"Don't be worrying me with your nonsense, God's curse on you.—I have no mind just now for jesting."

Then, with a blander countenance, and in a tone amounting almost to entreaty, he continued: "and with respect to Florence, too, when do you think of going thither? You promised, you know, Signor Malatesta, and me!—You know, too, how much depends on our having some one there, whom we could trust!"

"Wait, Sir Baccio," replied the youth, drawing another chair close to the one he was sitting on, and stretching himself out at his full length; "I see you have a lecture, and want to deliver yourself of it.—Now then, here I am, ready to listen to it: after you have said your say, you 'll feel better.—So say on; for now I have settled myself at my ease, I can assure you I'll not move in a hurry."

"You are but jesting, Troilus; and if I speak, it is for your good." And laying his hand on his shoulder, he looked at him intently, and then lowering his voice, proceeded: "Ah! what a fool you are! Don't you know that for an opportunity like this, of gaining the favour of Clement and the Medici family, many would purchase it at any price, and would consider it a great piece of luck, that it had fallen into their hands; and you—"

"And I—and I don't decline it," replied Troilus, moving about on his chair with signs of impatience. "It's all very fine—It's easily said, go to Florence, to Niccolo's.—Well, suppose me there, a regular Piagnone! Yes—and he, to be sure, will believe me, will admit me into his house—I shall know all that goes on—I shall soon devise means of acquainting you with their secrets—Eh! Sir Baccio, you travel post-haste—at a fine rate."

"That you will have some difficulties, I do not deny; but business in this world won't take care of itself;—we must be alive, and look after it ourselves. And unless you exert yourself, with respect to this matter, a little more than you have done hitherto, why, we may go on waiting for ever for the manna to fall down from heaven. Were there no difficulties and dangers in the case, why truly no promises of a rich guerdon would be held out to you."

"Oh! truly as to that," said Troilus, interrupting him, "I fancy I shall have earned it pretty well. Just think what a charming life!—to live with old Niccolo; why, one might as well be in St. Antony's cave at once. In the first place, I shall have to repeat long prayers—I must always have ready some saying, some prophecy of the great friar. By-the-bye; I remember me of one: *Florentia renovabitur*, and then, *flagellabitur*—no, no, that's not it, just the contrary—it begins with *bastonabitur*, and with regard to our being bastinadoed, he has told us true on that point at any rate—Ah! and next—do you think this will be a joke? to go, God knows for how long, and do nothing but play the fond and faithful spouse! If the pope's a gentleman, for this alone I deserve to be made a cardinal!"

"Oh! nonsense, you silly fellow; I have heard that the damsel is very pretty, besides, it is now a long time since you have seen her, and she will seem almost like a new face to you."

"Yes—almost, you say well!' '

" And besides, make yourself easy on that score; when we are masters of Florence, we'll think on that matter; I'll find you a young lady of some high family and with such a dowry, that you'll bless your stars. Oh! in a word—"

" In a word, I'll go; yes, I'll go. I see it's all one—I am condemned to hear sermons, here from you; and in Florence, from the monks. Were it only for a change, I should be glad to hear theirs a bit; for yours, my good Sir Baccio, begin to bother me most confoundedly."

At this point, several young cavaliers came round the fire. They were aware that Baccio had been for some time vainly endeavouring to induce Troilus, to undertake this noble scheme, and it had frequently been the subject of conversation among them, and of not a little raillery. So that Troilus, after having announced that he was finally resolved to go, proceeded to say: " I think, however, it would be as well, if I were to practise a little beforehand, the speech I shall make in the great council to celebrate my conversion."

Whereupon, mounting on a chair, in a whining tone, and with a nasal twang, he thus commenced: " A ray of divine grace, most reverend signors, a ray of celestial grace, I say, most worshipful magistrates, having lighted on this unworthy head, owing to the intercession of our blessed and pious Father Savonarola, has, most noble people, and right honourable woolcombers, silk-weavers, apothecaries, butchers, masons, dyers, and most illustrious and excellent tanners and tailors, has, I say, at last come to scatter the darkness, in which, heretofore, I, a miserable sinner, have been walking, seduced by the wicked counsels and bad example of that impious, villainous, most detestable and depraved scoundrel, that vessel full of all iniquity, that foul and damnable sinner, Baccio Valori—"

At these words the noise and laughter became so loud, as to interrupt his harangue, and those who were playing at lansquenet were annoyed and got out of temper; but the prince soon put a stop to the uproar, by merely raising his head, and pronouncing in a firm decisive tone, the single monosyllable:—*Paix!*—which produced instantaneous silence, so that they could hear, quite distinctly, the voice of a servant, who, coming to the door, said:—

"Sir Troilus! a lad wishes to speak with you."

"Let him come in," he replied, without moving. And immediately a boy was introduced, who said:—

"A young woman, who wishes to speak to you for a minute, as soon as possible, has sent me to say, that she is waiting hard by, in the street di Baroncelli."

Troilus hastily descending from his rostrum, said: "My Lords, the sermon at another time—the ladies must not be kept waiting." Then with a serious air, he added: "It's very hard that these girls must be coming even to the camp to plague me—Eh! but—I pity them—"

And affecting to heave a sigh: "See," he said, "what happens, all from being a handsome fellow. —Let us go, youngster, do you go first and lead the way." His companions saluted him with jokes, and complimented him on his good luck, while Baccio said to him, as he followed him to the door: "Suppose this is Lisa! if so, it'll be cheese to your maccaroni. Well, if I am right, and you have such a chance, mind and make good use of it; for it'll be a glorious thing for you!"

Troilus went out, and instead of Lisa found Bindo; who, more hardy than wise, had resolved to avenge his sister, ever since the day she was driven from her home; but never till now, had he found an opportunity to put his purpose into execution.

Had Troilus gone alone, he would probably have succeeded; but as he went along, he made a sign to four soldiers to follow him; and the matter ended in the manner detailed in the preceding chapter.

When the poor youth was taken prisoner, and was about to be hanged, Troilus might easily have interposed to save him, by a single word to the officer, who was entrusted with the maintenance of order in the camp, and the suppression of all rioting and disputes. Indeed, he was on the point of doing so; but he said to himself: "O, let him swing! may be that will put a stop to this cursed visit to Florence. That old villain, Baccio, will never dream, I should fancy, of sending me to the house of a man, whose son will have been strung up on my account."

Leaving the market-place with these thoughts, he was slowly bending his steps to the prince's quarters. But Baccio, who thought that probably from this circumstance, a favourable occasion might be found for forwarding his designs; and who was not a man to neglect trifles, well knowing that trifles often bring important consequences to pass, was not satisfied with awaiting his return, but going out a little after him, he went towards the market-place, and lighted on one of the soldiers, who had assisted in apprehending Bindo, and was recounting the transaction to a person who was with him.

Baccio eagerly demanding what had happened, and not waiting to hear more than that they were on the point of executing a son of Niccolo's, set off running as fast as he could; and as good fortune would have it, just arrived at the very moment, when the poor lad, with one foot on the first step of the ladder, was about to ascend the second.

All thought it a very strange thing to see the papal commissary appear there, pushing his way among the crowd, and calling out at the top of his voice; and the consequence was, that the executioner suspended his preparations, and Baccio, giving orders for the youth, whose face was now as white as a sheet, to be released from his fetters, endeavoured to revive his spirits with encouraging words, and bade him fear nothing; then taking him by the hand, he led him out of the crowd.

"This was the only thing that was wanting to ruin the whole scheme," said Baccio to himself, as he thought upon the risk he had been exposed to, of having all his projects frustrated by the death of Bindo; and as knaves are generally able to read one another's characters, he at once suspected Troilus's motives in allowing the execution to take place. As he went along on his way back, having hold of Bindo's hand, he said to himself: "Troilus, Troilus, thou art a young fox! and I am an old one; if you catch me tripping, the deuce is in it!—but I flatter myself that matters will go in my track, and not in yours."

Having reached the house, he consigned the lad to the care of his servants, who were ordered to supply him with food and wine, and to prepare a bed for him; and when he had once more endeavoured to reassure him with soothing and encouraging expressions, he returned to the hall, where, in a short time, Troilus too presented himself.

"Had it not been for me," said Baccio, clapping him on the shoulders, "at this very moment a kinsman of yours would be dangling his heels in the air. So, thank me, for having rescued you from a tremendous danger; for with that youngster, all your hopes would have perished of gaining the pope's favour."

"Indeed, I am under the greatest obligation to you," replied Troilus with a marble countenance, (if the expression may be allowed), in which it was impossible to discover a trace of what he really thought at that moment. Impossible, that is, to most; but not to Baccio, who discerned his thoughts exactly, and laughed at him in his sleeve.

Fanfulla, in the meantime, who had witnessed the preparations for the youth's execution, and the hasty arrival of the commissary to save him, followed the latter, when he retired from the crowd, and arrived at the prince's head-quarters, presently after he had entered the house. A servant man, at Fanfulla's request, went into the hall where the company were, and said to Troilus: "There is a man outside, he looks like a gipsy, who says he has something to communicate to you on the part of a lady of Florence, but he refuses to tell her name.

"Oh! to be sure," replied Troilus, "I suppose this evening they are thinking to make a fool of me! Tell him to go to the devil, himself and the lady too."

"No, no, stop," interrupted Baccio; and taking Troilus by the arm, he drew him out of the room, saying: "Eh! don't be in such a hurry! let us first hear what he has to say." When they had reached the antechamber where Fanfulla was waiting, Baccio pretending to go on into the next room, hid himself behind the tapestry curtain that served as a door, so that he could hear every word. Fanfulla, after saluting Troilus, told him that a lady, who was very well known to him, had quitted Florence, purposely to come and find him, and that she was waiting a little way off. Being asked by Troilus who she was and what she wanted, Fanfulla, with an equivocal air and half-laughing, said: "Who she is, and what she wants, you will soon see, and you will have no cause to repent of taking so slight a trouble as to come to her."

"Oh! tell me plainly, I say, my good man. I have my suspicions; tell me; it's Lisa, is it not?—Niccolo de Lapi's daughter?"

"You are right," replied Fanfulla, who fancied he could read in Troilus's countenance sentiments favourable to Lisa. "Come then, for the poor girl is expecting you, as she would an angel from heaven."

Whilst he was speaking, Valori, who was so posted that Fanfulla's back was towards him, raised the curtain and made a sign to Troilus to go at once, so that he replied: "Let us go then," and preceded by Fanfulla left the house, without taking with him any other attendant, on account of the lady being, as his guide informed him, in a retired spot, only at a short distance, and not beyond the last house of the village.

It would be very difficult to attempt to define, what the thoughts and feelings of Troilus were at that instant. The mysteries of the human heart are so profound, and the evil is so mixed up with the good, in a manner altogether inexplicable, that it is sometimes no easy thing to form an exact judgment of the worst of mankind. Perhaps on the point of putting his hand irrevocably to this dark deed, his conscience uttered a last reproof. The thought of once more seeing that poor girl, who had suffered so much for him, who had resigned herself so entirely to his love; and then to take her in his arms, and to turn that confiding love itself into the net, in which her nearest and dearest relatives on earth were to be entrapped, in order to deliver them up into the hands of their implacable enemies; all this was so horrible, so vile, that it was not possible for him, villain as he was, to nerve himself to the task with a calm and easy mind. But the voice of his good angel could not prevail with him, absorbed with the visions of future greatness, which ever and anon presented themselves before his mind in their most glowing colours. A feeling, too, of overweening arrogance and heartless pride whispered to him, that after all it was nothing to betray a girl of her rank, when the estate and fortunes of a gentleman were at stake. That moment of remorse and hesitation, therefore, if such he had, passed like a flash of lightning. He fortified his mind beforehand against all emotions of pity, and resolved not to be influenced by anything he might hear from Lisa; and in order to quiet his mind effectually and once for all, he said within himself: "Well, after all, what mighty harm have I done her? to have a child by a gentleman! As if such things had not happened before to-day! But I'll not do as many others do; I'll give her money enough to procure her a husband in her own rank."

As Troilus walked along indulging these reflections, Lisa, who with trembling heart had been waiting for him, for about half-an-hour, though it seemed to her that two hours at least must have elapsed, was dreading some new mischance. On the point of once more seeing him, whom she so loved, her heart, dismissing all fears about his constancy, was in ecstasies at the very idea of being, even but once again, folded in his arms. But the poor girl felt very sad, as she thought: "God only knows what he will think of me, when he sees me! distress and want have so reduced me—Oh! what would I give, to be as pretty as I once was!" And in order to do what she could, she began to arrange her hair; and, stripping off the mean garment she had on to give her the appearance of a gipsy, she was then in the same things as when she left her father's house (for other clothes, she had had none since that time), and these she proceeded to arrange as gracefully as she could. Amid all these preparations she was careful not to make the least noise, fearing at every moment lest she should be seen or heard.

At last, she caught the sound of footsteps in the street; she listened with bated breath: the steps approach; they pass over a wall, and come in the direction where she is. The darkness prevented her discerning who they were; but soon she heard Fanfulla's voice, saying: "Cheer up, my good girl, here he is himself."

The poor girl attempted to rise up, but her strength failed her. She fell on her knees and exclaimed: "Oh! Troilus, my own dear Troilus, I do then see you once more before I die!"

The young man lifting her up from the ground, pressed her to his bosom, with words of such passionate tenderness, that Lisa all but swooned in his arms.

We who know the heart of the man who uttered them, cannot bring ourselves to repeat them.

The kind-hearted Fanfulla at this sight, brushing his eyelids with his sturdy hand, said: "Why, I declare I'm like to cry."

The first few minutes having thus passed, Troilus took the little child in his arms, bestowing on it endless caresses. While Lisa, taking hold of his arm, and sidling close to him, said: "To think I was afraid of your scolding me, for having come like this, at night with my baby! I was a naughty girl; I ought to have known you better, my dear! Forgive me for having so wronged your goodness. Oh! but don't let us trouble ourselves now about that or anything else! We are once more together again! No more sorrows for your poor Lisa, now. All is forgotten—and indeed it was time! I have suffered so much, you know! I'll tell you all about it some other time! But now I won't think about it any more."

Hereupon they all three bent their steps towards the village, whilst Lisa continued in a lower tone: "No, I shall think no more about that, for the mind can change in a moment,—but not so the face. You once thought your poor Lisa pretty! Oh! how changed will she now seem to you! Don't be alarmed, my dear Troilus,—you see my heart is so happy,—in a short time I shall be myself again,—have patience for a few days,—and when I have recovered my wasted frame a little, if it please God that I again appear beautiful in your eyes, I shall say to you: 'It's all your doing, my love!' Oh! poor me! to think you will presently see my face, and find it so changed, so altered!"

"Have done, you silly girl, what fancies are these?" replied Troilus, smiling; "you wrong my love, and unless you dismiss such thoughts I shall be angry."

Poor Lisa, afraid of saying anything that might offend him, was silent in a moment, and pressing closer to him, only added: "Oh, my love, you are right. I am a silly girl to distrust you."

At that instant they arrived at the mansion.

Valori in the meantime, warned by what had but lately happened with respect to Bindo, to keep an eye on the movements of Troilus, had not lost sight of him, even in this his second departure from the house.

They met him in the street, and as he approached them, without giving any indication of his knowing who Lisa and Fanfulla were, or even appearing to notice them at all, he said to Troilus: "Stop a moment, as I have something of importance to tell you."

Troilus whispered to Lisa: "This is the commissary of the camp. I would not have him suspect who you are, as they look with no favourable eye here on the Piagnoni, or those who have anything to do with them. Just stay a moment on one side, you and this good man, while I speak to him."

Lisa, readily obeying, withdrew her arm from his, and went and remained in a retired spot in the street; and, on Troilus approaching Valori, the latter said to him, in high spirits: "Is it Lisa?"

"It is."

"Well then," rejoined Valori, "you must know, that in order to set a good face on your departure from the camp, I have thought of a plan—not a bad one as it seems to me. But it's not the time just now to enter on a long story. Your servant was here a moment ago,—devise some means of sending her with him to your quarters, and do you remain here, and we'll discuss matters." Upon this Troilus, returning to Lisa, said: "In consequence of important business I cannot accompany you; but do you go with the man that I'll send to you presently, and don't be afraid. If you want anything, give your orders to him, and he will provide you with everything. Adieu, Lisa, keep up your spirits, I shall be with you again presently."

So saying he left her, and went in search of his man-servant, whose name was Michel; the very same person who, dressed as a priest, had assisted at his pretended marriage; and as soon as he found him, he directed him to conduct Lisa to the Tower del Gallo, where his apartments were, and furnish her with whatever she might require." His servant said: "Consider sir, whether she is not likely to recognise me."

"Bah! there is no fear of that," replied Troilus: "in the first place, she was so frightened that morning, that she never looked at your face; besides, it's so long ago, and now in such a different dress, and with your beard that you have suffered to grow so long, the devil himself wouldn't know you again. So go along, and never fear, man;—and when you speak to her, be sure you mind and say any nonsense that comes into your head, to assure her that I do not think, never have thought, and never will think, of any girl but her."

"I understand. In a word, to do with her as I have with all your other young ladies."

"Just so."

The servant withdrew, and his villainous master rejoined Valori; who, having returned into the hall, they sat down together by the fire. Valori said:

"Now, pray listen to me; for if you only mind what you are about, this business cannot miscarry. I have been thinking, that if you go to Florence with Lisa, you will not, on that account, be sure to gain admission into Niccolo's house. You must win favour in his eyes by some other means; and for this purpose, Bindo will be extremely serviceable. And hereupon, he proceeded to explain to him the new scheme he had devised, which, as the reader will shortly see it put into execution, it would be superfluous to describe now. They settled between them the signals, that Troilus was to give from the roof of Benedetto de Nobili's house, the cipher he was to use whenever he corresponded by letter; they appointed the place where they were to be left, and thence to be taken by men, who, it was arranged, should never meet the parties who placed them; and this mode of corresponding had this manifest advantage, that if one of these messengers should chance to fall into the hands of the enemy, even if he would, he could not tell who had sent the letter. To all this, Valori added many directions, promises, and exhortations; and amongst others, he charged him to pay great attention to the friars of St. Mark's, and to frequent their company as much as possible; considering, as indeed was the case, that they exercised very great authority over Niccolo's mind.

"I'll give you a letter for Benedetto de Nobili, which you can sew up in your coat, or easily hide somewhere else. So now Troilus, show yourself a brave fellow; go in God's name; for to think what a prize you will gain with so little trouble, why, in good truth I envy you myself. By-and-by, when we meet again at the Tower del Gallo, I'll bring you as much money as will suffice for your wants, whilst in Florence; meantime let your days pass merrily with my little lady, and make her as happy as you can, for her present happiness will have to suffer a heavy abatement by-and-by, and I am not one of those miserables that delight in causing suffering without any object."

Troilus couldn't help saying in his heart: Thou art an egregious villain!—After this rising up, he bade adieu to Valori, and having taken leave of the prince, went away to his quarters, thinking by the way, how well devised was the new scheme that Valori had just communicated to him, and feeling towards him that respectful admiration, that scoundrels entertain for those, who are greater adepts at villainy than themselves.

CHAPTER IV.

The heights which look down upon Florence on the south, have their base within the city walls, so that from the street de Bardi to the gate of St. George, the city rises up in the form of an amphitheatre; outside the walls the hill rises with a gradual ascent, richly clad with olive-trees and vines, and studded with villas scattered in all directions; half way up stands Giramonte, and on the crest of the hill, from whence you descend into the Val d' Ema, is situated the Tower del Gallo, where the Count Piermaria di San Secondo had his quarters, and with him also Troilus degli Ardinghelli. This edifice does not consist of a mere tower, as its name would seem to imply, for the tower merely rises from one corner of the mansion, which is of a rectangular form, with an interior court, surrounded by a covered porch; the tower, which is twice as high as the rest of the building, consists of several stories, on the top of which is a terrace fortified with battlements, where a staff is fixed, with a bannerol made of iron, and bearing the figure of a cock.

At the period of our story, the path which led thither from the plain of Giullari was bounded by two rows of cypresses, between which Lisa and Fanfulla walked along, preceded by Michel, who had a lantern to show the way. Arrived at the castle, and entering the room where Troilus slept, the servant said:—

"My lady, my master has ordered me to do whatever you desire—though that was not necessary.—I, who am constantly with him day and night, know very well—even when he is asleep, I assure you, he has your name always in his mouth. Only last night, without going further back—I heard him—I fancy he was dreaming—he kept on calling out: 'Oh, that my dear Lisa were here! If I do not see her again soon, I shall certainly die.'"

It will be easily imagined, how delicious the words of this canting hypocrite sounded to the heart of the poor girl. In spite of her long walk, and the distress she had endured, she seemed at that moment quite to forget her weariness, and, with her child sleeping in her arms, she kept walking round the room; and upon observing the disorderly condition that everything was in, she said to Fanfulla, laughingly:—

"'Tis plain there are no females here. Just look—poor fellow!—he has a bed, that a dog would scarce sleep in."

At these words, she gave her child to Fanfulla, and began actively to arrange the coverlets, to put the sheets in proper order, and to see that they were disposed evenly and symmetrically on all sides, with that incontestible superiority in doing these kind of things, which is peculiar to the female sex. When she had made the bed, she turned her attention to the rest of the room, in which there was nothing but a few chairs and a table, which were so loaded with linen, with clothes, gloves, and other things, that many were lying on the ground. His armour only, all put together, hung up clean and bright by the wall. There was on the table a kind of portmanteau, half open. Fortunately, Lisa did not venture to touch this, or look in, to see what it contained; otherwise, she would probably have lighted on what would have given her grave reasons, to doubt the correctness of the words she had just heard from the servant-man.

Having finished arranging the room, and placed the child in his bed, she said, as she watched it quietly sleeping:—

"Oh, Fanfulla! surely all this must be the work of Providence. Last night he was like to die—and this evening, after all the cold and suffering of this day's fatigues, he appears as if nothing had ever been the matter with him. Oh! how long has my heart told me, that my coming here would put an end to all my troubles!"

The sequel of this story will show, what a fine thing it is to trust this heart of ours; which, however, most people, and women especially, listen to as an infallible counsellor, and unfailing prophet.

Troilus, in the meantime, having left Valori, had hastened to his apartments; and entering the room where Lisa was anxiously awaiting his return, threw his hat and cloak on a chair, and, drawing a deep breath, said, in a frank and joyous tone:—

"Well, here I am, at last; and here, thank God, there is neither prince nor commissary, nor any other bore to plague me.—But I see plainly" (and here he glanced his eye round the room), "that I am no longer under the care of that idle knave Michel, who keeps my room like a pigstye. My dear Lisa, you are ever the same dear, kind creature—a little angel!"

Then, taking her hand, and looking closely at her face, which, owing to the various emotions she had experienced that evening, was somewhat flushed, and, therefore, did not look so thin and wan as it actually was, he said to her:—

"You little vixen, Lisa, you wanted to scare me. Is this the face you said was so poor and disfigured? You are a little thin, but you will soon recover all that."

"Oh, my dearest!" said Lisa, in ecstasies, "is it really true? Are we indeed once more together? It seems to me all a dream.—I seem quite transported some moments.—Oh! if it were a dream; ah! how miserable should I be when I awoke!"

Then rising up, and leading Troilus to the bedside, she added:—

"See, here is our poor little Arrigo! How sadly he looks!—his bones are almost through the skin! You expected, perhaps, to find him bigger and prettier, eh? I have had hard work to keep him alive; I had no nourishment for him.—Oh! what days, what nights have I passed! I'll tell you all some day; but now I don't want to think of anything but the present—the past is past, and for ever."

Fanfulla, in order not to disturb these first moments, which he thought equally sweet and rapturous for both, had, till now, remained on one side; but Michel, now appearing with some supper, they all three sat down, and eat cheerfully. Troilus, then turning to Lisa's escort, who, from his bold visage, the tone of his voice, and the scars by which he was marked, struck him as being a different person from what his clothes denoted, said to him:—

"I have not had time yet, to thank you properly for the kindness, which you have shown to my dear Lisa——"

"Oh, Troilus!" exclaimed Lisa, interrupting him, "he has done so much for me, that if I should give my heart's blood for him, I could not repay him."

"You must know, my sweet young lady," replied Fanfulla, "that in all my life, old as I am, I have never had greater pleasure than what I feel this evening, in seeing you so happy, and safely restored to your husband. Oh! what in the name of goodness puts it into your head, to talk about kindness and repaying? Such compliments are not necessary with me, they may be all very well with courtiers.—And the first time you want anything, you have only to say: ‘Here, your life's blood—I want it;’ that will be guerdon enough for me.”

To these words Troilus was about to reply, thinking at the same time, that he might very well, and with great propriety, ask him who he was, for he was curious to know; but Michel came running into the room, out of breath, from having ascended the stairs as fast as he could, exclaiming:—

“Sir Troilus, his lordship the commissary is here and wants you; he is coming up.”

The young man, appearing surprised, and turning impatiently about on his chair, said:—

“It's strange, that I can't have a moment's peace—It's a great nuisance!—Well, show him a light, and ask him to come in.” Then, turning to those who were seated with him at table, he added: “I suppose it's some mishap or other, of which we have enough. Do you both retire into the small chamber there, and mind you don't let him get scent of you; for woe be to us, if he should see you: he would want to know who you are;—besides,—if we are alone, I shall be able to get rid of him the sooner!”

Fanfulla and Lisa, hastily rising up, took a light, and retired into an adjoining apartment.

A moment after, Valori entered; and whilst Troilus was saluting him, saying, in a loud voice, “What fortunate circumstance brings you here at this hour?” with a motion of his eye and of his hand, he intimated to him that Lisa was in the next room. Valori replied by a glance; and, having taken a seat, proceeded to open the conversation, taking care to speak loud enough for her to hear him. In order that the principal thing, which he wished her to overhear might seem to be mentioned incidentally, and as if he were referring to a matter of trifling importance, he observed to Troilus, that the Prince had sent him to charge him with an important commission, and one that must be kept quite secret; that at present he would allude no further to it, but that he should appear to-morrow morning, armed and mounted, on the parade ground in the plains of Giullari; and that he would be entrusted with an enterprise, in which, if he succeeded, it would prove of signal service to him. He then launched out into compliments and flattering expressions, telling him how high he stood in the Prince's favour, and that, if he could but keep it, he would reap the highest honours and rewards. Passing from these to other topics, as mere ordinary matters, he said, as if recalling the subject, all on a sudden:—

"Oh! by-the-bye, you know that lad—the one I rescued from the gallows at your entreaty—I am sorry for it, but there is no remedy—what did not take place to-day, will to-morrow."

"How mean you?" said Troilus.

"Why, the prince, I know not from whom, has got scent of the matter, and he says these attempted assassinations are not to be endured; and the rather, since they have told him that the youngster is a son of a Piagnone—that Niccolo de Lapi." At these words, a suppressed groan was heard in the adjoining chamber. "That young madcap he has ordered to be hanged to-morrow; and when he has expressed his determination, why, you know, it's useless to interpose. In one respect he is right: if the insolence of such fellows is not restrained, we must be ever on our guard to save our lives from these traitors. What's more, since the prison down there, near the prince's head-quarters, is full, the lad has been brought to this tower, and is confined for the night in the vault on the ground-floor." Troilus, thereupon, began, in a tone of the most earnest supplication, to implore Valori to intercede for him, and find means to save him.

"Listen to me," replied Baccio, drily; "you are but driving your head against a wall. And if you will be ruled by me, don't meddle in this matter; for such eager interest about the son of a Piagnone has a very ill look. I wish you well, and therefore I'll say nothing; but mind what you are about, friend Troilus."

So saying, he got up, and going out of the room with him, descended the stairs. When out of reach of Lisa's hearing, they burst into a loud laugh, and Valori said: "Heard you the groan, when I said, *Niccolo de Lapi?* I hit the mark, and drove the shaft home. Well now, see, here are a hundred gold crowns and the letter: be wary, and all will be well. I have already communicated with the Count Piermaria, who will direct his men to obey you in everything; and so, prepare for the execution of this weighty enterprise, worthy of a Knight of the Round Table; and you'll be able to say to Niccolo: 'Here is your son, set free by the might of my most puissant arm!'—A better letter of credit you could not have;—and thank me for it. Adieu."

Troilus, going upstairs again into his room, found Lisa there, who, weeping and distracted, threw herself on his neck, exclaiming: "O God! O God! what did I hear? A brother of mine here?—And they are going to put him to death? Oh tell me, pray do! who is it? how? what for? can't they save him! But which—which of my brothers is it?"

"Bindo," replied Troilus, who also pretended to feel great concern; "it is Bindo, poor lad! it was all from loving you too much; and therefore do I excuse him, and would save him at the cost of—" And here he struck his forehead with his hand, like one distracted with grief. He then told Lisa all the circumstances, adding, "I did not say a word to you about it. In the first place, I have hardly had time; and in the next, I thought he was safe, and was in hopes, that to-morrow I should get him set free, and send him to Florence. But now, what remedy is there? O God! O God! what a terrible affair!"—and thrusting his hands wildly into his hair, he broke out into fresh paroxysms.

"What *remedy* is there?" cried Lisa, almost distracted; "some remedy there must be!—There must be some means—a thousand!—But surely, it must not, it cannot be, that Bindo is going to be put to death—it's impossible!—for me! on my account!—His blood would be on my head—on thine—on that poor child's there! But it is not true, is it,—that there is no remedy? Oh yes, Troilus;—do tell me there is—that you can save him. There are two of you; and I, too, am with you,—I,—I alone shall be equal to three;—oh! it is too terrible,—that I should have on my soul the blood of this poor lad!—it is too much—too much!"

"Calm thyself, Lisa, in God's name!" said Troilus, embracing her.

"Calm yourself," said Fanfulla, "for with all this raving and tearing, we shall make small way. Let's see;—well,—I have been in worse plights than this!—but, do you see, there's little good in weeping and crying."

"I am not crying now," the poor girl instantly replied, trembling all over; "no, see, I am quite calm now;—I will do what you bid me. Tell me what I am to do—but save my poor brother!—It is true, is it not, you know how? Oh! if you did but know!—a wretched creature, already overwhelmed with so many causes for remorse—and now, perhaps, to add this murder—oh, speak! tell me! you have no heart, no pity—"

Troilus had sat down, with his head between his hands; when, all on a sudden, starting to his feet, and catching Lisa by the arm, he exclaimed:—

"Yes, by heaven! there is one way, and only one, and we must avail ourselves of it. Lisa, more than my life will I sacrifice for you! To-night, within three hours of this time,—when all are asleep, there remains at the gate only one man on guard.—I know the man's room, who has the key of the prison:—with this dagger I'll kill him: the other soldier on guard, I'll serve in the same manner.—If it succeeds, and it cannot fail, to-morrow we shall all be safe in Florence."

Lisa could not utter a single word; but rushing into his arms, and throwing her own around his neck, she covered him with kisses. When she was become somewhat composed, Troilus made her sit down by his side, and thus addressed her:—

"For a long time, my dear Lisa, I have felt strongly inclined to quit this camp. My ancestors were all Palleschans, and I too was one. I engaged in this war with a view to the restoration of the Medici; but never thinking that this traitor of a pope, as he is now found to be, was aiming at the utter ruin of his native city. There is not time now to explain to you minutely what my doubts and scruples have been; how I have been assailed on one side, by the love of my party; on the other, by my love for you and Florence. This only can I tell you at present, that I am wholly resolved to fight for my country, and not against it; and I regard the present opportunity, which is placed in my way by Providence, as a last inducement."

"Oh! say no more, my own dear Troilus, for I shall never be able to bear such joy. What will my poor dear father say, when he knows your intention?—O God! this is a happiness too great for me.—And that poor little baby, who was cast out by his granny, without a home or a roof to shelter him!—This is thy merciful doing, great God! This is more than I deserved."

"Now," said Fanfulla, "that all is in a fair way, let us not lose time in transports and raptures, but let's turn our thoughts to what is to be done."

"Yes, yes," said Lisa; and turning to Troilus, all animation and delight, she added: "you must know, if it be necessary to use force to ensure our safety, that this worthy man whom you take for a gipsy, with his threadbare doublet," (and she struck Fanfulla's shoulder with her hand,) "this good man, I say, knows pretty well how to turn his hand to this kind of work." And opening the folds of his outer robe, she displayed to his view the coat of mail he had on. Troilus eyed him with astonishment; whilst Lisa continued: "Would you like to know who he is? None other than Fanfulla da Lodi, one of the thirteen who fought at Barletta, and the bravest of them all—"

"You do me too great an honour, my young lady."

"What say you? had I good company when I came hither?"

Troilus, who had heard this name, as that of one of the most desperate bravadoes, that were numbered amongst the soldiers of that time, pretended to be delighted, when he knew who he was, at having such aid; but to himself, he said: "I must mind what I'm about." At first, before he knew who he was, and thinking him some Florentine shopkeeper, he had arranged to take him with him to the pretended murder of the gaoler; as he thought to himself: "This fellow will slink behind in a fright; and if he only sees me brandish my dagger, he will stoutly declare that I really killed the man; and not only will he himself believe it thoroughly, but all in Florence, also, who hear the story." But now that he knew who his companion was, he said: "If I take him with me, he is as like as not to cut every man of them to pieces, of the whole guard, happen what may." Therefore, when Fanfulla, still more emboldened by Lisa's praises, and delighted at having something to do in his own peculiar line, said: "Sir Troilus, albeit it is no very glorious feat, to attack a man unawares, yet in the present case, which belongs not to ordinary ones, if you like, I'll assist you to dispatch one of these knaves, or even both," Troilus thanked him, but added, that it was not safe for more than one to go on this errand, for all depended on silence and secresy; and therefore he had better leave it to him, as he was acquainted with the house; and for the rest, they need be under no apprehension."

It was just one hour past midnight; and in three hours, they had settled, they would commence their project, calculating that by break of day, they would be some way distant from the camp. Troilus, having to arrange all that was necessary, that no accident might mar the success of their plans, persuaded Lisa to lie down and rest for the short time that still remained. She consented to this, for she felt, indeed, great need of it. When she had lain down, Troilus covered her with his cloak, and left the room, promising her he would be back as soon as he could, and bidding her not to be uneasy if he should seem long, for at the appointed hour he would come and wake her without fail.

It is indeed a blessing, that it is denied to man to foreknow the future. Those few moments of bliss that we enjoy from time to time, and which help us to support the sorrows of life, would otherwise be lost to us, or at any rate be reduced to a very small number. Poor Lisa, who, after all her sufferings, was now reposing with her child on her husband's bed, whom she had been afraid she should never see again, or, if she did, perhaps only to be cruelly repulsed, was now enjoying the unexpected bliss of seeing him once more, not only fond and faithful, but resolved to abandon the party, on account of which he had hitherto been the determined enemy of her father and of Florence. Could she have opened her eyes to the future; could she have read the heart of him, who was now the cause of all her happiness, she would have sprung from that bed, as from a viper's nest; and even the small degree of peace and comfort she now enjoyed, even this brief pause in her sorrows, would have been denied to the poor unhappy girl, for whom so much suffering was still in store. But ignorant of the future, she at last felt, after so many storms, a secure and placid calm diffuse itself through her heart. She fancied it would be easy enough, on their return to Florence, to effect a reconciliation with her father, now that Troilus was changed; and thinking that the merit of this change was owing to her, she hoped to find even greater favour in Niccolo's eyes than ever. Her heart promised her infinite happiness; and the poor girl, (as is always the case,) listened to its flattering suggestions. Giving herself up entirely to these dreams of felicity, by little and little she sunk to sleep, whilst Fanfulla, seated at the foot of the bed, with his back towards her, was reciting his psalms and prayers, mindful of Father Benedict's last injunctions. In order to overcome his inclination to sleep, he would not rest against anything, but knelt erect, with his hands clasped between his knees, repeating his office, in an under tone, indeed, but distinctly and rapidly. By-and-by, the motion of his lips became gradually slower, his eyelids drooped, and his head kept dropping forward. At last, he entirely lost his balance; but soon recovering himself, he resumed his former position, and began again to mutter his devotions; and in this way he passed the time, which Troilus was employing very differently.

Going down stairs from his room, he proceeded to that of the Count San Secondo, which was on the ground-floor; and as a confidential person, and one from whom the most secret and important counsels of the Pope and his commissary were not concealed, he informed him of his entire scheme, and how it was concerted with a view of putting a more plausible face on the fact of his returning to Florence; requesting him at the same time to be so good, as to facilitate his design. The Count heard his narrative, nor did he think anything required to be altered in his plan, except one thing that he thought not advisable, and that was, giving Lisa and her companion to understand that he had killed two men, without its being true; for at least it would be better (he said) that it should be true of one ; and he gave as a reason, that this transaction might very likely be talked of in Florence, by means of the prisoners, or in some other way, and the fact would come out, that no one had been killed; and that circumstance would, some time or other, give rise to suspicions as to Troilus's sincerity, and his reasons for quitting the Imperialist camp.

The latter was aware that this objection was not unfounded; but he was at a loss, not knowing how it was possible to surmount this obstacle. The Count relieved him of his perplexity by telling him, that amongst his men there was one, who was a very great friend of Anguillotti da Pisa,* and who had urged him to take flight; and as he knew for certain, that he had promised him, he would not let slip his revenge, he had taken the resolution of ordering his sergeant, in the very next encounter with the enemy, to have him picked off, and so to rid himself of him; and he added: "So as not to keep him waiting any longer, I'll order him on guard at the gate; and in doing so, I shall but anticipate the execution of what I had designed for him. A little sooner or later, will be all one to him."

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* An officer in the bands of the Count Pier Maria, who, in consequence of some quarrel with him, had fled into Florence. Being taken in a skirmish, he was stabbed by the Count's own hand.

"If that be so, and it makes no difference to you, or rather, you have a reason for taking him off, I, too, am of opinion that it will give an air of greater truth to the transaction."

As to the gaoler, whom the Count would not have had killed on any account, as he was a very trustworthy man, he had him called before him, and, in the presence of Troilus, informed him, that during the night Troilus would come into his room for the key: if he came alone, he was to give it up to him, and in that case there would be no difficulty; but if (in order to provide against all possibilities) he had any one with him, Troilus would pretend to stab him, and he was to feign the death-struggles, without uttering a word, as it happens in the case of one who is struck in a vital part. Having thus settled matters, Troilus, on taking leave, said to the Count:—

"Can I supply you with any article from Florence? Now that I am about to turn silk-mercer, if you want any velvets, or brocades, or broad-cloths, you'll favour me with your custom, I hope, eh? And I shall soon be able to tell you how much a yard."

"Adieu, adieu, you rogue! But if you would, in a yard or two of any stuff you like, send me Anguillotto's head, the man who brought it me should have a largess, that would enable him to lead an easy time of it. You may tell him, however, that unless he is tired of his life, he had better not come near me."

Troilus went out, and proceeded to the stable, where he placed the saddle and bridle on his horse, and covered his hoofs with bandages, to prevent the clattering on the pavement from being heard; and, when all was in readiness, he returned upstairs, and found Lisa and Fanfulla fast asleep. He sat quietly down, so as not to disturb them; and, having remained thus for half-an-hour, when he thought it was time, he awoke them, and said: "It's time now—let us get ready."

Lisa was soon up; and, taking her child, still fast asleep, in her arms, she did what she could to keep him so. Troilus put on his armour, assisted by Fanfulla; then taking a lantern, which he covered with his military cloak, they all three went down stairs, on tip-toe; and when they had arrived at the bottom, and had gained the porch of the court-yard, Troilus said to them: "Wait here, whilst I go for the key." Fanfulla wanted by all means to go with him to assist him, and he whispered in his ear: "I'll clap a finger on his throat, and I can tell you that'll soon quiet him;" so that Troilus plainly perceived, how necessary it was he should go alone; and it was with great difficulty, that he succeeded in freeing himself from his too zealous companion. "No, no," he said, "remain where you are, and if you wish really to assist me, when you see me come back, whilst I go and get the youth out of his prison, do you rush on the man who stands sentinel, and mind that the first blow is also the last." He then left him, without waiting to hear his reply, and in two or three minutes came back again, holding up his hand to show the key. Fanfulla, meantime, had advanced stealthily towards the gate, like a tiger about to pounce on his prey, having in his hand his naked sword, which was very heavy, and cut like a razor. He came within three steps of the soldier, who, leaning his arms on the muzzle of his arquebuss, kept nodding his head in a kind of half-sleep, and by this means exposed a part of his neck. He saw Troilus come back, and, with a back-handed stroke, he dealt him such a blow, that the soldier's head fell on one side, and his body on the other. Fanfulla wiped his sword on the grass, and restored it to its sheath; and, shouldering the arquebuss of the dead sentinel, he went forward with Lisa under the cypress-trees, into a dark and shady spot, to wait for Troilus; who, while all this was going on, went down to the prison vault, and awoke Bindo, whom he found asleep, and bade him follow him. The poor lad, who imagined he was come to murder him, joyfully did as he was bid, and was soon at his sister's side, whom he recognised with the greatest astonishment, and kissed her with transports of joy. Having first told him not to speak loud, she gave him to understand, in few but glowing words, all that had happened, and Troilus's resolve, at which they both, as far as present circumstances permitted, expressed their delight. Troilus at this moment appeared, leading his horse; when, going along silently one after the other, they took the road that leads to Baroncelli; whence it was their intention, passing behind Bellegarde, to come out on the Pisan-road, and crossing the Arno by the bridge at Signa, to enter Florence by the gate al Prato.

Walking along, and keeping a sharp look-out to avoid the spots where the different companies of soldiers were bivouacking, they arrived, without molestation, after two hours' walking, at the Pisan-road. For the remainder of the way there was no other danger, but that of meeting, perhaps, a body of scouts ; who, if they were Imperialists, Troilus had the watch-word for the night; if Florentines, Fanfulla had only to make himself known ; and so, in any case, they could take no harm. Being, then, in high spirits, and satisfied with their success thus far, they stopped awhile to allow Lisa to rest; and then, placing her on the horse, they made their way towards Signa; and having passed the bridge at this place, they at last, through San

Donato, arrived by sunrise safe and sound at Florence. Bindo on the road had walked by Lisa's stirrup, listening to the narrative she gave him of the events that had happened to her, and all that had transpired that evening. It need hardly be said, whether she dwelt on the courage and goodness of her husband; who, to save her brother's life, had, as she fancied, renounced his splendid prospects, which the late conversation of Valori had hinted at, and which had been concocted by that villain, with the sole object of magnifying the pretended sacrifice on the part of Troilus, and setting him in a more favourable point of view with Niccolo, his family, and the Piagnone party. The youth, full of gratitude towards his deliverer, could not sufficiently extol him, and said that cerainly Niccolo, both in return for so great a service, and also for his withdrawing himself from fighting against his country, in order to fight for it, would receive him with welcome, and so an end would be thus put to all their miseries. Troilus, who guessed what was likely to be the subject of Lisa's conversation, and judging that it would be calculated to further his designs, in order to give her full scope, kept behind with Fanfulla, to whom he represented, in a long harangue, how that, hitherto, he had very reluctantly sided with the Palleschan party, drawn into it by a certain fatality, and induced by the example of his family, but that, from this time forward, his desire was to be a good Florentine; and what with his being a fluent and plausible speaker, and his hearer a simple-hearted man, and utterly free from a suspicious temper, he easily succeeded in imposing on his confidence; so that, before they set foot within the city walls, he could already boast that he had three persons, who would testify to his good qualities, his heroism, and the sincerity of his political conversion.

Having entered by the gate al Prato, and arrived at the district of All Saints, the party divided. Bindo took the direction by Parione, and the rest followed the line of the Arno. But before leaving them, the youth, after thanking Troilus, and telling him he owed his life to him, promised to use his utmost exertions to effect his being received at home, with that regard and affection which his generous conduct so well deserved.

Troilus, upon arriving at the city-gate, had let down the vizor of his helmet, to prevent his being recognised before he had redeemed himself from the penalty affixed to outlawry, whereby, not having a pass, any man might arrest him. Having then accompanied Lisa to the house of Niccolosa, where she was to remain till matters were arranged, and not deeming it prudent to go at once to the magistrate, to whom all matters relating to rebels and outlaws appertained, he resolved on going with Fanfulla to St. Mark's, where he might remain in perfect safety, while measures were being taken, to release him from the consequences of the edict.

Arriving at the wicket-gate, Fanfulla said, as he knocked:—

"The best thing will be to go to Father Benedict; he is the kindest of all, and will, I am sure, take a lively interest in the matter. When he can do one a good turn, oh! he's as merry as when going to a bridal;—but of the other friars, one cannot say so of them all;—and many, too, have not forgotten the night when the monastery was attacked; and with them, a Palleschan is the very devil himself."

At that instant the porter opened the gate, and, seeing his old friend and companion, he said, raising his arms aloft:—

"Oh, welcome, brother Bombard! It's so long since you were here, I was almost beginning to be afraid."

"Well, thank God, here I am, alive and all right," replied Fanfulla; "and I am not alone. I must speak a word with Father Benedict. See here, I have found a novice."

The porter, eyeing Troilus, who was so muffled in his armour that even his eyes were scarce visible, said, as they came forward:

"A novice of your own cut, unless I am much mistaken: for, by his look, he has more need of a soldier's corslet than a friar's frock."

Having mounted the staircase, they found the good father in his cell, on his accustomed seat, with his St. Augustine open before him, his spectacles as usual on his nose, just as Fanfulla had last left him; so that he seemed as if he had never moved all the time. As he entered and looked at him, he could not help saying to himself: "I should like to know, if this is called living! One might as well be a mushroom!"—Then saluting his superior, who welcomed him in a kindly manner, and rose slightly to embrace him, he introduced Troilus to him, saying who he was, and recounting all the various accidents by which he was brought thither; his liberation of Bindo; the resolution he had formed of joining the Piagnone party; and his reunion with Lisa, to which nothing now was wanting but Niccolo's consent.

"Who," he went on to say, "will not repudiate the man who has saved his son. But, in case it should be necessary, we are come to request of you a slight favour. If *you* would speak to him, he cannot say—no."

Troilus thereupon, removing his helmet, and exhibiting to view a countenance expressive of humility and contrition, began with such earnestness, and such an appearance of sincerity, to speak of his affection for Lisa, the pain with which he recalled his past life, the vows he had taken to lead a better one for the time to come; and, in a word, so skilfully acted the part of a Piagnone, that Father Benedict became convinced of his sincerity, and promised to do all that lay in his power, to arrange matters with Niccolo and the Government.

"In this case we must lose no time," he said, rising up and taking his staff from its corner: "do you abide here in the convent. Brother George, though you have now more of the soldier than the friar, yet you belong to the house; so I leave this brave knight in your charge. Get him something from the refectory: and I trust I shall soon be back with good news. That worthy Niccolo!" he said, as he raised his eyes to heaven, "he is indeed a worthy good man!—a little austere sometimes, it cannot be denied, but one of the good old stamp, the best friend this convent has. I should like to see him happy once more—and time is it he should be, for he has had much to vex him. Yes, yes, let us hope for the best; matters are at that pass that, from a regard to the world, he cannot but desire the same thing as ourselves."

Sallying forth from the convent, and hurrying along, as rapidly as his great age would allow him, he was soon at the gate of Niccolo's house. There was no one at home but Laodamia, her father, and Bindo, who had arrived a few moments before, and about whom they had been in a state of the greatest alarm, from not having heard any tidings of him, since the day before. As soon as he reached home, he went to Niccolo at once. His father received him with signs of agitation in his face, and addressed him in rather a harsh tone, through which however you could see the joy he felt, at seeing before him, safe and sound, that one of his sons who alone could make him, from time to time, forget his wonted austerity, and for whose safety, when he saw him exposing himself to so many dangers at his tender age, he trembled more than he did for the others.

Bindo, by that ready perception which renders children so quick in discerning the thoughts and inclinations of their parents, was less afraid than anybody else of Niccolo's stern and angry countenance, and well knowing how to comport himself in the moments of his stormy ebullitions, without seeking on the present occasion to excuse himself, he asked his pardon for having engaged without his leave in so difficult an undertaking; but, he added, he could not repress the strong desire he felt to avenge at once his country and his sister; and narrating to him in his own frank and open manner all that had occurred, when he came to the part, where he stood with the halter round his neck, mounting the ladder of the gallows, the poor old man, who had ever been proof against such emotions, could not refrain from throwing his arms round his son's neck—and a reddish tinge reanimated for a minute or two the habitual paleness of his cheeks. With eager impatience, he asked, who had delivered him; and when he heard the name of Baccio Valori, a cloud came over his face, and he said within himself: ,, O God, thy will be done!"—for it required no slight degree of resignation, to enable him to endure the thought, of being under such an obligation to this vile traitor. Bindo went on to tell him about his imprisonment, and the inevitable death which threatened him.

" But," he added, " who do you suppose rescued me?—Troilus."

At these words—at this fresh degradation—Niccolo could control himself no longer.

"Troilus, you say, Troilus saved your life?—But, O my God, my God! what have I done, that all this shame and dishonour should be heaped on my head! And thou, dastard, didst not prefer a thousand times rather to die?—Dost thou not know that we must die—that death sooner or later cannot be escaped?—but that infamy we may escape—and that it is infamy, to receive one's life at the hands of a man, who has betrayed his country—who has dishonoured and corrupted the blood, that runs in your veins—who has trampled these grey hairs in the dust?—and, by his actions, has as good as said to thee—to thy brothers—to us all—that we are a herd of cowards?—who has branded our shame on our foreheads—inscribed it on the walls of this house, and stamped it on the very shield you bear, and which I entrusted to you honourable and without a stain? Didst thou not know all this?—and yet returnest alive into my presence?"

CHAPTER V.

To these harsh words, uttered without stop or interruption, in an excited tone and with flashing eyes, Bindo had vainly tried to interpose a word in reply. To be branded as a coward by the only one, whom he could not summon to answer for the charge with his sword, was a grievous and intolerable disgrace; for, although but a boy, his natural disposition was not less fiery than his father's; boldly, therefore, raising his head, he replied:

"This traitor, as you call him—he who has so injured us—I went alone and unaided, save by my sword, in the midst of the enemy to kill him. Wrong I may have been, in not asking your leave, but it was not the action of a coward, I fancy. When he came to free me from my prison, I was asleep; and when suddenly woke up, I did not even recognise him. I came forth, and finding Lisa, from her I learnt that Troilus, now come to a better mind, was intending to return with us, and henceforth fight for the liberty of Florence——"

"Troilus in Florence!" exclaimed Niccolo, with the greatest astonishment.

"He has returned hither with us. He has acknowledged his errors, and now only desires to be allowed to prove himself a good citizen—to purge himself from the brand of treason, and obtain your pardon."

"My pardon!" said Niccolo, with a bitter smile. Then continuing for a moment absorbed in thought, he added: "Let him efface his past villanies—let him return to his duty—let him venture his life for this ill-fated city, and then he shall have God's pardon, which is far better than mine."

"And yours too," said Father Benedict, who, entering just at this moment, had heard these last words, and guessed, from seeing Bindo, and the flushed countenances of both father and son, to whom they most likely referred. After receiving Niccolo's respectful salutation, and having sat down, he added: "I come to congratulate you on two circumstances: one, that a rebellious and undutiful son of this city is now returned repentant, to aid in defending it. Such an example, at the present crisis, is not to be overlooked. Would there were many such!—it would be a matter of congratulation to us, and the contrary to our enemies. The other is, that God has opened a way to remove all scandal, and for you to show, that you treated Lisa with such extreme severity, not so much on account of her offence against yourself, as of that against her country, by marrying one who was its enemy. Sir Niccolo, I am come, as is my duty, to convey to you words of peace, and to entreat your pardon on behalf of Troilus and your daughter. May their submission serve to repair the injury they have done you. Troilus will, by-and-by, make amends for the evil he has inflicted on his native land; and, if he was the first to wrong you, yet now he has saved Bindo from death. God, the just and terrible, receives back whosoever heartily repents. There is more joy over a returning sinner, than over ninety and nine just persons. Sir Niccolo, would you endeavour to amend, or to invalidate the judgments of heaven—to show yourself more implacable than eternal justice itself ?"

The old man, wrapt in thought, answered not a word; with his hand on his beard, his eyes bent to the earth, and his brows knit, he was ruminating whether he could trust himself, so far as to allow one, than whom on earth till now he had not a greater enemy, to come into his presence. It appeared to him too serious and important to be decided on thus hastily; it took him so by surprise, that it was but natural, to wish to have time to familiarise himself with the idea. Had he listened to his heart alone, he would have replied to the good father with a flat refusal; but yet, even before he had heard his application, if he had had time to reflect a moment, his own good sense would have told him, that Troilus, restored to his country, and become a patriotic citizen—Troilus, to whom he was indebted for the life of his son, could no longer be regarded as Troilus the Palleschan; and, sooner or later, since it was not possible to undo his marriage with Lisa, it would be necessary to pardon him and to become reconciled.

On hearing how the matter had been effected, and the killing of the soldier, it appeared hardly reasonable to doubt his sincerity; and the old man not being by nature given to equivocate, at last said:

"Whoever is a friend of the people, and fights on the side of liberty, can never be looked upon as an enemy by Niccolo de Lapi. As to the injury he has done me, I admit, that now it is compensated by a great act of humanity; besides, on all accounts, in presence of our public calamity, private animosities ought to be forgotten; they would make divisions where all ought to be united. Father Benedict, you have known Niccolo these fifty years; you have known my very thoughts, and how careful I have been of the honour of my poor house! I could never have imagined, that the events that have fallen out would ever have happened to me. Heaven saw I deserved this correction! God now commands the sacrifice to be made: may His will be done." And after a moment's pause he added: "I forgive them both."

"Sir Niccolo," said the good Father, placing one hand on his arm, "God will remember your words; and I who know you, as you say, know what they cost you, and therefore what they are worth."

So saying, he rose up to return to St. Mark's, impatient to convey the good news to Troilus; when Niccolo stopped him. On the point of making a sacrifice, for his country's sake, of a hatred so rooted and intense, on the point of receiving, in the character of a son, one of that party, that had always opposed the warmest of his wishes, which was to see Florence free and happy; and had opposed it, too, by means which were at one time secret and insidious, at another, open and violent, but at all times base and dishonourable, he felt he required a last disburdening of his smothered, but not extinguished, indignation. Having once more prevailed on father Benedict to sit down, he said, shaking his head, and darting from time to time such terrific glances, that they inspired the mild and benevolent priest with fear: "Yes, I pardon them!—I have said the word, and that's enough; but it goes hard with me! I do not deny that it is not without violence to my own feelings. Consider, good father, that there has never been a misfortune, there has never been a loss or an injury, of all that have afflicted our country and my family, since 1434, when Cosimo returned, up to the present hour, that has not come from these traitorous Palleschi. It was owing to them, that the bones of my father were laid in a foreign land!—It was owing to them, that we became the prey of King Charles in '92!—Through them it is, that this people, heretofore so religious and well conducted, have been corrupted by the vilest examples, and have been reduced to such a state, that Florence is become a sink of iniquity!—It was their doing that Prato was burnt and sacked in the year '12!—By these filthy, corrupt wretches it was, that the excellent and holy father Savonarola was put to death; and now, not satisfied themselves merely to lay violent hands on their country, they call to their assistance hordes of barbarians, to aid in mutilating and destroying her. —And this wicked pope blesses the swords destined to slaughter his fellow-citizens, and lay waste the land that nurtured him! I ought not, perhaps, to say any more in reference to Troilus, since I have resolved to forgive him, but with you, father—these fifty years you know we have been friends—I cannot help saying for the last time: he has sorely wrung my heart!"

After this, remaining silent for a moment, he said with a sigh: "Well, this evening you will bring them both here. I should wish my sons and Lambert to be present; for Lambert too, I look upon as a son. I am aware that the mansions of the Ardinghelli family were sacked, and partly reduced to ruins; I wish to let him see, that I don't do things by halves. He may come and live here, till he has a place to go to: this house has long been too large for so small a family."

Father Benedict, overjoyed at the satisfactory termination of this interview, after having loudly commended the magnanimous determination of Niccolo, took his leave, and made his way back to St. Mark's. As soon as he saw Troilus, he gave him to understand, that that very evening he would take him to his father-in-law, who henceforth received him as a son, and forgot the past.

It is not necessary to say that the young man expressed himself delighted, and grateful to the good friar for his kindness. It now remained for him to be freed from his sentence of outlawry, by the magistrates. Father Benedict, therefore, wrote a letter to Alexander d' Antonio Scarlattini, one of the five syndics of the rebels. Fanfulla undertook to convey it; and starting off, he was not long before he returned with a favourable answer; by which Troilus, once more restored to his civic rights, could go out from the convent with the greatest safety to rejoin Lisa, who, in a state of feverish anxiety, was waiting for him, and was ready to die for joy, when she heard how happily all their miseries promised to terminate.

Having given free vent to their joy for some time, Troilus went out; for, as he said, having nothing with him but his armour, and having no in-door dress, he wanted to go and fit himself out, that he might appear becomingly in the evening. Bending his steps, therefore, towards Calimala, he was ruminating as he walked along, how he might, without exciting suspicion, get an interview with Benedetto de Nobili, in order to give him Valori's letter, and confer with him respecting the affairs of the Palleschan party.

Benedetto lived in one of the streets that, leading from Calimala, open on the Esplanade degli Adimari. Troilus, as he passed before the door, found it shut; at the windows not a living being was to be seen. He went on further to make his purchases, and in a tailor's shop close by, he saw some clothes of the kind then worn by soldiers, viz. a Spanish cloak, having a hood behind, breeches slashed at the knee, with velvet stripes running down the thigh, and a light cap for the head. He chose dark colours, as he said: "This old fellow Niccolo will then think me more after his cut." When he was equipped, he bound his armour in a bundle, saying he would send for them; and whilst he was occupied in arranging them, he got into conversation with the tailor, to see if he could learn from him, where Benedetto was gone; for he would not be seen entering his house, nor dare he venture to ask about him in plain terms; so, after a long preamble, he made up a story, to the effect that he had come from Bologna, respecting a law-suit instituted against him by certain merchants, and that he wanted to find a doctor of laws, with whom to consult; and at last he begged the tailor, if he knew any one eminent in that line, he would direct him to him. The latter, as Troilus hoped he would, mentioned among the first Benedetto de Nobili, and said that if he did not find him at home, he was sure to meet with him at Giunta's printing office, opposite the stone steps of the Badia, or at the Inn del Porco, or in the workshop of Benvenuto Cellini, a goldsmith in the New Market. Troilus directed his steps thitherward, and found before the door several youths and men, all militiamen of the different quarters, who every day assembled there, amusing themselves with watching Cellini at his work and conversing with him; for he, too, was enlisted under his gonfalon, and used to talk so grandly, that it seemed as if he would, alone, gulp down the whole imperial army. When Troilus came up, there was a loud chattering going on, for Benvenuto had decamped without anybody's knowing it; and the report ran, that he had returned to Rome. One said, they ought to make him come back; another insisted that his goods should be pillaged; and others shouted out: "He ought to be hanged!" and the greater part agreed, that he should be outlawed.

This uproar happened very fortunately for Troilus, who observed Benedetto in the crowd, and so could accost him without anybody's noticing it. He came close by his side, and said, looking up to the sky, "To-morrow it will rain:" (this was the signal agreed on between Valori and Benedetto, by which the latter might recognise those who came to him from Baccio, and know whom he could trust.) At these words Benedetto started; and it struck him at once it must be Troilus, whom he had been expecting some days. Upon looking at him attentively, he thought he just remembered his face, for he had not come across him for many years, and even then he had only known him by sight.

Retiring with him a little on one side, and being assured that it was the right person, he said: "We must not be seen together—but in order that we may converse in safety, you must get enrolled among the brothers of St. Jerome's cave;* I go there every Saturday, and every vigil of a festival. In order to discover each other, as we all have our face enveloped in our cowls, watch for my making the sign of the cross with my bare hand, and then I'll put on my glove, coughing three times; upon which you will come to me and say,—'It's cold.'—Now make haste away, and if we ever meet in public, you must pretend not to know me."

Troilus gave him Valori's letter, and they parted without another word.

Benedetto, who was impatient to ascertain its contents, hastened home, shut himself up in his office on the ground floor, and having opened it, found that, in the first place, he was cautioned to keep a sharp eye on Troilus, who, from his light and frivolous character, ready to turn about any way, was in danger of being worked upon, and even changed by Niccolo's influence; he then pointed out to him the course to be adopted by him, in conjunction with Troilus, for the general interests of the party, and concluded with the following words :—" And when the city is in our hands, which will be the case sooner or later without fail, I leave it to you to prevent Niccolo's flight. I say no more on this point, as I know very well to whom I give this charge."

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* Varchi says (lib. 9) that, in 1530, there were in Florence seventy-five companies of seculars, who used to meet for devotional exercises. They were of several kinds, and under a variety of names. Four, which contained only men of noble rank, and used never to meet but at night, were called Buche (caves). That of St. Jerome (vid. Lastri) first began in 1410 on the mountains of Fesolé, at a place called Belcaso, where Antonio de Conti Guidi was the founder of the Hieronymite hermits in 1380. For the convenience of the members, it was transferred to Florence, and held under the hospital of St. Matthew.

"Never fear!" said Benedetto, thrusting the letter into the fire, and watching it till entirely reduced to ashes.

The hatred he entertained towards Niccolo had its origin many years before this, from the following circumstance. Benedetto having held some magisterial office or other, it was said he had not quitted it with clean hands. Niccolo, who had reason to know that this charge was not without foundation, hearing him in a public meeting railing in the severest terms against a citizen, who had drawn on himself suspicions of a similar character, reproved him by saying,—" The man who so confidently accuses others, ought to be free from any stain himself." Benedetto, who was conscious such was not his case, said nothing, but he treasured it up in his memory; and, like a consummate dissembler, as he was, he managed so well that, being reconciled to Niccolo, he persuaded him to lend him several thousand crowns, whereby he was enabled to arrange his affairs, and stop the mouths of his accusers. To show his gratitude, after the fashion of scoundrels like himself, he was now plotting Niccolo's ruin, not so much with the view of robbing him of the money he held of his, as with the hope of getting, when the government fell into the hands of the Palleschi, a part, and perhaps the whole of his property. For, whenever the siege was brought to a close, they had stipulated among themselves for the exile or death of their own personal enemies, in the same way that Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus did in their retreat, in the isle of the Reno.

Troilus in the meantime had returned, to wait till it was time for him to go to St. Mark's, to join Father Benedict; that they all three might accompany him to Niccolo's house; for Fanfulla too (which we forgot to mention), was directed by his superior to come, that he might, if necessary, give his testimony respecting all that had taken place at the Tower del Gallo.

When Lisa saw him come back dressed in a style, that imparted an elegance and gracefulness to his naturally good figure, and yet displayed, at the same time, a certain sober and unaffected gravity, she exclaimed: "Oh how handsome you look, my Troilus!" Then guessing his motive in the colours he had chosen, she added: "When you were gone, I remembered I ought to have just cautioned you, against wearing clothes too smart, like the soldiers in general; because my father is averse to them; but I should have known, silly girl that I was, that my Troilus has no need of these impertinencies, and knows much better than I do, what is right and proper. Oh, do let me look at you!—there, turn round. Now, this way. Oh! who is there in all Florence so handsome as you, my dear?"

Troilus, who was of that opinion, quite as much as she was, imprinted a kiss on her lips; but in that kiss, had it not have been for the veil that blinded her eyes, she would too well have discovered, that there was less tenderness than condescension; but the time was not yet come, when she was to be made aware of his real character.

"Now, just listen," continued Lisa, sitting on his knee, with her left arm round his neck, while her right hand was arranging his hair, or the folds of his dress; "listen, my love; I want just to say a word or two to you beforehand;—here she is, you will say, playing the Miss Malapert. I know, you don't want my advice—but yet you know, they say, that a fool knows more about his own house, than a wise man does about another's,—and I know my father—you know—at first he makes one feel afraid. Ah, you laugh!—not make you afraid, I know,—but yet I shouldn't like, that that stern look of his should meet your eyes, without your being prepared for it,—and then you know, he has some reason to be angry with us—he might say some word a lit', little,—what shall I say?—But you won't, will you, you won't mind, for your poor dear Lisa's sake? Remember that she too has gone through a great deal, poor thing!—and I have gone through it, willingly; I am now happy, I would suffer twice as much all over again, to be with you, and that you might never leave me any more. This then is what I wanted to say to you. You are not offended with me, are you? and before my father, whatever he says, you won't take any notice,—and——"

"I know what you are going to say, Lisa, my dear. But you wrong me. Do you think I could be where I now am, without having thought of all this beforehand? without having armed myself to endure from Niccolo, anything, even reproaches?"

"Oh, bless you, my love! You have removed a heavy weight from off my heart. And I was all the while scarce daring to say it to you! Oh! those who see how handsome you are, don't know how good you are!"

So saying, she threw herself on his neck, without uttering a word, and remained so for some minutes. Then rising up, and drying her eyes, she said: "I must now think about my little Arrigo—I should like to dress him a little smart! — poor child, he has nothing but these few things! But I'll try."

And taking her child in her lap, she began to arrange his hair, and put his clothes in order; and while doing this, she heard the palace clock strike half-past four. At five, they were to set off. The approach of the hour, that had been so eagerly longed for, now excited in her heart an undefinable dread; she felt her pulse beat more rapidly; a thousand surmises, a thousand fears crowded on her imagination; at one moment, she turned her thoughts to

Heaven with a short and fervent prayer, at another she kissed her child, and then again she turned her eyes on Troilus, to see if she could gather, by looking at him, a little courage, a little strength to support her; hoping to meet a look of his to inspirit her; but he was sitting with his elbow resting on the window sill, his countenance fixed and immoveable, and his eyes turned towards the street; but what his thoughts were at that moment, God only knows. Lisa would have felt a glance of his eye just then, as a light from heaven; but it came not, and five o'clock struck. For a minute she felt, as if her very limbs failed her; but the blood of Niccolo ran in her veins; and, therefore, that moment of weakness passed away with the rapidity of lightning. Taking her child in her arms, she rose up, and, closing her eyes, uttered a prayer to God to help her; after which, dismissing her fears, she, with Troilus, directed her steps towards St. Mark's, without either of them uttering a single word the whole way. Fanfulla and Father Benedict they found waiting for them at the convent lodge, with whom they proceeded along, and presently rang at Niccolo's gate.

Niccolo had, in the meantime, directed his sons to be at home at that hour, and had charged Laodamia to prepare a room for her sister and her husband, where they would be comfortably accommodated with their child. After having got ready all they might require, she came down stairs, and found her father seated in his chair, and his sons

Averardo, Vieri, and Bindo standing round, all in their armour; Lambert too was there, and Niccolo was saying to him: "I am aware, my son, how hard it must seem to you, to see this man in my house. —But what can I say? He is Lisa's husband!—he is come to fight on our side! He has, moreover, saved my poor Bindo from death! Could I refuse him my forgiveness? Could you have done so? I wished you on this occasion to be present, because I know your fortitude,—and you must have met, first or last—and may be, it will be less distressing to your feelings, if it takes place in our presence."

"My father," replied Lambert, "whatever shall seem good to you with respect to me, either now, or at any future time, you shall never have occasion to say aught by way of extenuation to me. It is enough for me, that you will consider me as a son of yours; and for the rest, I will strive to show, that I have a mind that rises superior to every accident of fortune."

"Thou speak'st like a man, Lambert!" Then shaking his head, he added: "Ah! Lisa, Lisa, thou wast a silly child!"

Upon this, Averardo, who was a blunt soldier, of a stern aspect, and few words, without an idea on any other subject but fighting, said, somewhat previshly:—

"Yes, and we have to pay pretty well for these women's silly fancies.—That's the reason why I never married a wife—Well, now, I hope these married folks won't be long afore they're here—

I'll not wait long for 'em, by the holy rood. There's been seen a great stir in the camp to-day—I shouldn't like the dance to begin, and me not there."

Vieri, unlike his brother, was one of that easy sort of people, who have the good fortune to be always happy, even in the midst of trouble and wretchedness; indeed, he scarce seemed a Lapi at all, so he said with a smile:—

"Oh! never fear, if we should miss a shot or two, there will be plenty more, for all that—of such wares there is an abundance, God be thanked—would that we had as much good meat and wine! I have seen from the walls, what havoc they have made among the vines on the hill above Arcetri; there remains about as much of them, as would cover the palm of my hand. If things are like this everywhere, we shall have to drink wine drawn from the well's mouth."

Niccolo said not a word, and Averardo not showing the least disposition to smile, said, half angrily—

"Ah! you're a happy fellow, it's all one to you how matters go."

"To be sure! Why, you must know, that I think it'll be quite time enough to take on, when I'm in my coffin, at present I see no good in 't. Come, come, let's cheer up, for may be 'twill all end better than you fancy. And thou, my fine fellow, Lambert, don't be down-hearted, you have had a great escape.—Lisa's my sister, to be sure;

but no matter; you would have had a silly little lass for your wife; and of this sort there are scores in Florence, to be had any day; it's all in good time yet."

Whilst this conversation was going on, the old servant, Mona Fede, made her appearance, and having laid a cloth on the table, she placed on it a tray, with two bottles of wine; Maurice, Lambert's serving man, the same that he had rescued from drowning in the Adda, followed, bringing in goblets and a dish of preserves; for in Italy, at that period, every reconciliation was accompanied with drinking, just as it is, at the present day, in the southern provinces, where there are frequent and bloody quarrels among the peasants; and we remember to have been present at one of these peace-makings, when two men, who, the day before, were each bent on taking the other's life, were led forth, all mutilated and bandaged, to drink together; and we were told, that after this ceremony, not a doubt remained in the mind of either, as to the sincerity of their mutual forgiveness.

After the brief dialogue that we have recorded, they all remained silent; for in those moments, when the heart is full, words fail. The old female only whispered in an under tone her directions to Maurice, and from time to time stole a look at her masters, for she was dying to talk about Lisa's return, and to show how delighted she was at the thought of it. Seeing them all looking so gloomy, just when, as she thought, they ought to be in high spirits, and put on a cheerful face, she couldn't understand it; but she presently made herself easy, with her usual reflection on all matters above her comprehension, and which concerned her superiors, by saying to herself:—" Well, it's their way! It's no use, we must let 'em be."

Maurice, on the contrary, under the cold and impassive exterior that characterises men of a more northern sky, felt deeply affronted, at having to welcome, and do honour to, a man, who had so foully wronged his master, for whom he entertained an exclusive affection, apart from all self-interest; which, to the shame of humanity, finds its most perfect exemplar in the dog. And when Mona Fede said to him in a tone of self-satisfaction—

" See, Maurice, of these flasks there are but few in Florence! I had laid them up in store—my heart seemed to tell me the use they would be put to!" he replied with a shake of his head—

" Why, as to this Droile of yours, a harquepuss would suit him, petter than goplets of fine!"

At that instant a ring was heard at the gate, and all started. Fede ran to open it, and after her rushed Laodamia; not so much, that she might the sooner embrace her sister, as to save her from entering alone into her father's presence. Bindo too advanced to meet Troilus, to introduce him. Scarcely was the gate open, when the two sisters were locked in each other's arms, and continued so without uttering a word, as long as it would take to repeat an Avemaria. At last loosing from their embrace, Lisa took her child, which till now had been carried by her husband, and advanced along with Laodamia, who, with one hand on her sister's arm, with the other held her round the waist. Father Benedict went first; after him, came Troilus with Bindo; and Fanfulla last.

Niccolo rose to receive them, and stood by his chair, with one hand on the arm of the chair, and the other hanging down by his side. He stood with his chest and shoulders erect; his eye was steady; not joyful, indeed, but serene. On one side stood Averardo, with his dark and austere countenance, his left hand resting on the hilt of his sword, his right behind his back; on the other, Lambert; who, if he ever had to thank God for giving him fortitude of soul, it was surely on the present occasion. Even Vieri had assumed a grave and serious expression. No sooner was father Benedict inside the room, than he began to say, as he came forward, followed by the rest—

"Sir Niccolo, you see here your daughter, and with her, Troilus; who, knowing that they have need of your forgiveness, are come to ask it—ready now, and ever after, to do whatever you may desire—and they hope you may be induced to receive them into favour, and to regard them, in the light of dutiful and obedient children."

Whilst the good father was speaking, Lisa, trembling from head to foot, and supported by Laodamia, kept advancing nearer, and at last fell on her knees before her father, with her head bending low down, and partly hidden by that of her child, who, at the sight of so many strangers, clasped its mother closely with its little arms. Troilus, too, a little behind her, was kneeling on one knee. When going over this scene beforehand, in imagination, he had made up his mind not to descend to so lowly an action, as to kneel to a silk-mercer! He would have considered the man mad, and laughed at him, who had even breathed such a thing to him. But on entering that room, the tall and majestic form of the aged patriot, the venerable authority that sat upon his brow, and appeared in his whole person—the mild wisdom—the fortitude that was displayed in his very look;—all this had thrown him off his guard;—had so overawed him, that his pride all at once forsook him; and feeling himself so mean, so abject and contemptible, when confronted with this dignified old man, he was, as it were, he knew not how, impelled by a secret and irresistible influence, to prostrate himself at his feet. At that moment, he felt his resolution fail him to accomplish his vile treachery; he fancied that the first glance of the old man's eye had penetrated to the very bottom of his heart—that he had read, at once, his villainous secret; and he was almost on the point of embracing his knees, confessing everything, and imploring his forgiveness. But to bring him to this, the single emotion raised in his mind at his first introduction, was not enough, unless accompanied by one of those virtuous impulses, that sometimes induce even the worst of men to pause on the brink of a precipice; but no such impulse visited the heart of Troilus. At that moment, rather, the image of Valori rose up before him, and that of his friends in the camp; he seemed to hear their scornful laugh at his mean-spiritedness; and these thoughts served still more to confirm him in his original intentions; and being well aware that, from not performing his part well on the present occasion, suspicions might arise respecting his motives, from which the total ruin of his scheme might ensue, he composed his countenance with a serious gravity, and summoned to his aid his natural effrontery, in order that nothing might be wanting to give an air of reality to his hypocrisy.

As for Niccolo, he had, at the sight of Troilus, felt rise within him a conflict of varied emotions; but keeping them down, he merely fixed his eyes on his face, to see what the man was like, who had been the cause of so much trouble to him.—

"He is a fine-looking fellow, there's no denying it," he said to himself; but he presently added,—"However could Lisa take a fancy to such a coxcomb!"—for if he had pleased Niccolo's eye, he was at once repelled from his heart. But he made no account of this, his first impression, thinking it, perhaps, the effect of the dislike he had hitherto entertained towards him; and no sooner did he see him bend his knee, than he said,—"Rise, Sir Troilus! Lisa, rise up, and listen to me!"

When they had risen, Niccolo proceeded to say —

"If I have opened the doors of my house to you, it is with no intention of using any unkind words to you, or uttering any reproaches on your past conduct. As for myself, and the injury you have done me, I pardon it freely, and from my heart; and I promise you to forget it entirely, and for ever; so may God blot out my offences. But I must tell you, Sir Troilus—and I now do so openly, so that I may never have to allude to the subject again—I must tell you, that if you had not have returned to Florence; that if, instead of coming to defend its liberty, as, I am given to understand, you purpose doing,——"

"And you understand rightly, Sir Niccolo; that is my only desire——"

"I would fain believe it—but allow me to finish what I have to say. If, then, on the contrary, you had continued with our country's enemies, be assured, Sir Troilus, that Niccolo de Lapi, sooner than receive you as his son-in-law, would see you cut to pieces. But now, if Florence has gained one good soldier, and one brave defender more, not only do I receive you as my son-in-law, but I rejoice in all my sufferings, since they result in such a service to the State. Henceforth, I make no difference between you and the rest of my children; but it is right you should know, that I have sworn to them, as I also swear to you, by those ashes, which you see there in that niche" (and he pointed to them with his finger), " and which were collected, still warm, from the funeral pile, whence the holy soul of Father Savonarola took its flight to the mansions of the blest—I swear to you, that if ever, on an evil day, you should in anywise fail in your duty as a good citizen, I shall pursue you—either I with the sword, or that God who hears me, and ratifies a father's malediction, will pursue you with his vengeance."

Troilus at these words felt a chill run through his veins; but like the culprit, who, when placed on the rack, tries to bear up, and not to utter a word which may betray him, he replied with all the ardour and vehemence he could summon up:—

"And I, Sir Niccolo, on condition of being henceforth considered by you as a son, call down on my head the consequences you denounce against failing in my duty; and, by the help of God, and of the blessed Savonarola, whom, from this time forward, I take as my sole patron and protector, I trust no harm will light upon me therefrom."

"I trust so, too," replied Niccolo; then, pointing to his sons one after another, he said: "This is my son Averardo, this is Vieri, this Bindo, and Lambert."

At this name Troilus started, for he knew all that had passed between Lisa and him. Lisa herself dropped her eyes, and turned quite pale. Niccolo remaining for a moment as if in deep thought, added, as he looked at Lambert, who stood quite motionless and still, his looks all the while betraying an inward agitation: "Lambert! Niccolo has granted his pardon! Now, my sons, listen to me, and hear what I am about to say." (As he pronounced these words, the old man's face became flushed with emotion, and the tone of his voice rose to a higher pitch.) "The question now is about our country's safety! of her injuries let us think, not our own! Her final ruin threatens us, and can we have any other thought, than about her danger? Union! concord! in God's name; for divided kingdoms have ever been the prey of every enemy; this, Florence knows only too well; this, the whole of Italy is a proof of. Against the enemies of our liberty, against the traitors to our republican institutions, may the hatred, the energies, and the arms of all be turned; but whoever repents, let him be received as a brother. Remember Lorenzo de Medici, when at the point of death,—the blessed Savonarola offered him mercy and pardon on the sole condition of restoring the commonwealth, which he had unjustly brought under his power, and giving back their liberty to the people. He refused the offered pardon, and died like an impious villain, as he was; but it rested with himself to obtain it, nor would our blessed master have denied it to him, had he shown any sign of repentance, and restored what he had wrongfully usurped. So, let us not refuse to accord our pardon. How will God help us, if we stubbornly persist in offending him?"

"Oh! Sir Niccolo," said father Benedict, clasping his hands together, "holy words are these! Would that all Florence were here to hear them!"

The old man now turned to the servant, and gave her his directions; and she, coming forward with Maurice, stopt in front of Niccolo, and presented to him the tray with the wine and the goblets. He proceeded to fill them, and having made each take one, they all drank. After this, Niccolo placing his hand on Troilus's shoulder, kissed him (as was the custom on occasions of reconciliation), kissed his daughter and her child; and then they all successively did the same.

Niccolo would have Mona Fede, and the man-servant, drink also. The old woman instantly obeyed, and approaching Lisa with the goblet in her hand said: "My Lady, I knew this day would come, and—not to boast—but I took a vow at the church de Servi to fast every Saturday, that God and the Blessed Virgin might grant us this favour."

"I am under a great obligation to you then," said Lisa, smiling.

But nothing could prevail upon Maurice to drink; he kept replying to the pressing solicitations of old Mona Fede: "I am not tirsty!" not even Lambert could overcome his determination; so that on his giving up the attempt, Vieri said to him, in a jesting tone: "If you had known he had so little relish for wine, you had better have left him to drink the waters of the Adda."

Maurice, sullen and moody, made no answer, but went away, growling to himself: "Harquepuss, and not goplets of fine!"

The company, without minding him, had in the meantime ranged themselves around the hearth. The two sisters sat next each other, Laodamia with Arrigo on her knee, Troilus by the side of Lisa, whose hand he held in his own; Father Benedict was next to Niccolo, and all began to chat freely together; when, all on a sudden, they started up and became dumb; with eager ears they listened to catch the sound of the great bell of the Council-house; presently two, three, four strokes, which soon became louder, ringing furiously as if to sound an alarm. Almost at the same moment, all the city bells replied; and this was accompanied with a heavy and distant sound, which seemed to come sweeping along overhead, and to proceed from the shouts and roars of a multitude at a distance. Then followed shots of musketry in all directions; and after a while, the louder roll of the artillery. The noise and uproar meanwhile kept coming nearer and nearer; the streets became filled with people, everywhere cries and shouts were heard; doors and windows were hurriedly open and shut; it seemed, in fine, as if the whole city were up in arms, in consequence of some sudden and alarming accident; the hurrying to and fro was increasing every moment, and the noise of their talking becoming louder and louder, till presently they heard a crowd of men rushing past under the windows, and shouting: "To arms! To arms! The people and liberty! The enemy is in Florence!"

CHAPTER VI.

To attempt to describe the fury that seized upon Niccolo and his sons at this uproar, to paint the fright of Father Benedict and the two girls, and the agitation of Troilus, on whom it came quite unexpectedly, would be vain; but the reader can very well fancy it for himself. Averardo seized his arquebuss, which he had deposited in one corner of the room, and gnashing his teeth, exclaimed, in a voice hoarse with rage—"Cursed be the hour, when I left the walls!"

His two brothers also, with Lambert and Fanfulla, had rushed to their arms: the latter, without any sign of agitation, as one quite used to such sudden surprises, lit the cord of his arquebuss at the hearth, observing at the same time—"This is something more than a jest!" When they were all ready to sally forth, five or six men of the lower orders, silk-weavers in Niccolo's service, rushed hurriedly in, and said to him—"Sir, there are fifty of us outside, and we are come to guard your house, and defend you to the last extremity."

"How, defend me!" exclaimed Niccolo; "to the walls! to the walls! to-day we must all die for our liberty, and I care not if I am the first."

Whereupon the old man, fiercely seizing a weapon that stood in one corner, was preparing to go forth with the rest to the defence of the city; and notwithstanding that they all besought him, and even endeavoured to hold him back, and his daughters most of all, he sternly repulsed them, first with words, and then with violence, thrusting them aside, and exclaiming—"I am resolved to die, at all hazards!" And so, withheld neither by force nor by persuasion, he was rushing furiously towards the gate, when a messenger arrived from the Seigniory, to announce on the part of the Gonfalonier, that the enemy was not in Florence, as the rumour had led them to believe; but that they had begun to assail the walls, however, with a great number of scaling ladders; and therefore all the fighting men were summoned, to hasten to the other side of the Arno, towards San Niccolo, where the attack had commenced.

At this announcement, finding that matters were not at the last extremity, as he had at first imagined, he allowed himself to be prevailed on, but not all at once, to remain; and stopping at the street door, and raising his hands, he said, in a loud voice, to the young men as they were going out—"Farewell, my children! Remember, you are Christians, and free citizens; perhaps when we meet again, it may be in another world."

They were soon lost among the crowd; and Troilus, who was obliged to acccompany them, and show himself forward and courageous, thought within himself—"A pretty thing, truly, if all

Baccio's fine promises should be brought to a conclusion, the very first night, with a musket-shot!"

Niccolo then, sending off to the walls the greater part of the operatives who had come and offered their services to him, retained six or eight to aid him in placing his house in a state of defence, and getting it ready to sustain an assault. His first outburst of fury had given way to reflection; and as the city was not stormed, as he had fancied, changing his first determination, and considering that his poor daughters ran the risk of falling into the hands of the soldiery and the Palleschi, he resolved to fortify himself, and keep his assailants in check; and if he failed in this, and there remained no means of escape, to set fire to his house, and to perish with his daughters in the flames; and so to maintain his own liberty and their honour. And Niccolo was the man to do it, too.

Preserving the ancient customs of Florence, which he would not change in any point, he always kept ready, iron bars, chains and planks, of which to form a barricade, the *serraglio,* as it was called. They were stowed away beneath the porch of the court-yard, and were now in a moment haled into the street; and they were so constructed, that they could in a very short space be properly erected.

This done, he sent one of his men into the house of the Carnesecchi, which ran by the side of Niccolo's, but separated from it by the street De Conti, to direct them to make the necessary preparations, as he was intending to bridge over the street;

and, as he himself personally urged on the work, he soon saw, projecting from holes formed for that purpose on the first story of his house, long beams which, sustained by men who were inside, were introduced into corresponding apertures in the Carnesecchi mansion. On these beams were placed rows of planks, which were fastened together so as to form a very strong and solid bridge, capable of sustaining men and implements of warfare; from which they could pour down a destructive fire on the enemy in the street below.

Whilst Niccolo, in the middle of the street, (where by dint of the lights placed at all the windows, it was as bright as day,) loudly calling first to one party and then to another, and inspiring all with his exhortations and his presence, was directing these operations; those in the inside of the house were busily occupied, in conveying every species of weapons from the chamber, in which they were kept stowed away, and piling them up in places nearest to the spot, where the fighting was likely to take place; that is, in the passage which joined the street-door, and upward to the first floor beneath the windows, which opened on to the barricade. Laodamia, Lisa, and the old servant too, aided in this emergency, and though almost worn out with their harassing toil, their running backwards and forwards, and their agitation of mind, yet they did anything that was required, bringing bundles of pikes, stones, large crossbows, arquebusses, and arms of every description.

The same ardour and activity that was shown that night by Niccolo and all his family, displayed itself spontaneously, and in an extraordinary degree, in every house in Florence; and the Prince of Orange, who had, owing to the rain and the darkness of the night, and from its being the vigil of St. Martin, calculated upon surprising the guards, or finding them overcome with wine; and relying on this, had made a sudden attack along the line of the walls from the Porte San Niccolo to that of San Friano with a great number of ladders, in hopes of taking the city by a coup-de-main, was, contrary to his expectation, received with such a storm of artillery, and found the bastions so well manned and defended, that he was fain to retire from the attempt, with shame to himself and no small loss on the part of his troops. Had he have succeeded in scaling the walls at any point, it is difficult to say what the result might have been. For our own part, we are of opinion that not even in that case would he have carried the city by storm; for the soldiery flew to their arms in an instant, the whole body of the citizens rushed to the other side of the Arno, and throughout the quarters of the city contiguous to the camp, as far as the bridges, in all directions, the streets were full of armed men. From the houses, the old men, the women, and even the children, would have rendered no small assistance to the defence, by hurling down stones, tiles, and anything else that came to hand. Despair would have redoubled the energy and daring of a people, who had on former occasions given tolerable proofs, what they were capable of in civic fights; and it is just possible that the Imperial army, which did not number as many as fifteen thousand serviceable troops, might have found a grave in the city of Florence. But this brave and unhappy city was destined to longer calamities, and to a more rigorous chastisement.

After a short time the enemy's troops, altogether despairing of carrying their point, relinquished the attempt, and returned to their encampments; from whence, next day, the Prince of Orange set out for Bologna, to obtain from the emperor and the pope, who had gone there for the coronation, fresh supplies of men and munitions of war; without which, he judged it impossible to make any progress in the siege. The soldiery of the various quarters, perceiving the danger to be past, separated and returned to their homes. The streets became empty, the windows were closed, the lanterns and torches of the soldiers disappeared, and all relapsed into the usual state of quiet and repose. In every family the old men and the women, who had been left behind at home, hearing the well-known step of their husbands, sons, or brothers, who had sallied forth a short time before, and whom they thought perhaps never to see again alive, but who now returned safe and sound, after having, by their valour, repulsed the enemy and saved the city, ran to meet them in a transport of delight, loading them with caresses, applauses and embraces, and shedding tears of joy, not forgetting to return thanks to Heaven for having rescued them all from such imminent peril. Those brave men, those poor artificers, quite exhausted, dripping with sweat, and drenched with rain, and not a few covered with blood, laying aside their armour for a time, assisted by their wives, their sisters and their sires, who at once set about cleaning and repairing it for future encounters, were resting for awhile; their hopes and courage rising higher, from the victory they had just obtained. Sitting by the fire, or refreshing themselves with such food, as their scanty means, and the present scarcity supplied, and surrounded by their family, whose fears had scarcely subsided, and who with open mouth stood listening, they were recounting the particulars of the attack; describing the onslaught of the enemy, their arms and ensigns, their strange accoutrements, and ferocious countenances, which could be very clearly distinguished, owing to the quantity of lanterns and torches they carried with them. They detailed, in the most graphic language, their approach, the planting of the ladders, the eager and tumultuous mounting; and then how, all at once, from the flanks of the bastions, where in the casemates, heavy guns, and artillery of every calibre were concealed, there came bursting forth with a loud roar, as if from so many mouths of the infernal regions, the flashes of a thousand pieces, the shots from which, striking the ladders sideways, hurled them down, men and all, in one huge heap in the fosse below. To this account, they added a description of the wounds, the slaughter, the strange and horrible deaths of the miserable creatures, the cries, the shrieks, the writhings of the dying, the smoke, which darkened every object, the incessant flashes and rolling thunder of the artillery; and then once more, they all united in praising and blessing God, for having saved them from the hands of such ferocious enemies.

Those of the combatants who had been wounded, were carefully tended; the worst cases, in the hospitals; the rest, at their own homes. Nor did they omit to reckon up their comrades, whom they had left dead on the walls. Some pitied them, some prayed for them: but more envied them, regarding it as certain, that their souls, as being those of martyrs, had been admitted at once to the glories of paradise; and the more devout and zealous of the Piagnoni, thinking the prophecy of Father Jerome had been fulfilled on this occasion, who had promised to the Florentines, even angelic aid, became still more enthusiastic in their faith; and there were not wanting some, who affirmed that they had seen seraphim in the air, who with flaming swords discomfited the enemy, and at every blow, swept down whole lines of the imperial troops.

No one, more than Niccolo, could boast of a sincere and lively faith in the friar; and if he was not exactly persuaded (for he had too much sense to go as far as that) that angels would appear visibly, to defend the city, he yet founded on the words of Savonarola a hope, not to say a certainty, of some special aid from heaven, whereby the enemy would always be repulsed. And yet he it was, who had thought it possible that they had gained an entry into the city!

The commotion ended, and the danger over, he had returned to his room with his daughters, and as he sat by the fire, he was reviewing in his own mind all the events of that evening; and said with a sigh: "*Modicæ fidei! quare dubitasti?*"—words frequently used by the friar, and which he now applied to himself, sorry to think that he could have wavered for a moment.

Whilst he was thus engaged with his own reflections, Lisa and Laodamia were standing at the window, impatiently awaiting the young men's return, not without some alarm and apprehension, lest some misfortune had befallen them. But their alarm soon subsided; for towards midnight, they all returned except Averardo, who very seldom came home to sleep, as he wanted no better chamber than the port-holes of the bastions, and no other bed than the naked earth. The same intoxicating joy that we have attempted to describe, as marking the return of the soldiery to their respective homes, pervaded in like manner Niccolo's house, when Bindo first, and after him the rest, entering all joyful, and throwing down with a clatter their heavy arquebusses, still black from their recent discharges, and filling the room with the smell of burnt powder, gathered round Niccolo and the girls, recounting with eager delight, in glowing and vivid language, the glorious discomfiture of the imperial arms. They vied with each other in detailing their own valiant deeds, and those of their friends, and the most famous of the citizens; and in doing so, Niccolo learnt that Bindo had received a wound from a ball on the left side of his corslet; and the youth's eyes, as he continued repeating, that it was a mere scratch, and not of any consequence, sparkled with joy, as he pointed to the stains that still marked his sword, and thought within himself: "I too am a soldier now!"—Vieri recounted, how Lambert had hurled down a great stone with such precise aim, and at such a critical moment, on a ladder filled from the top to the bottom with assailants, that he swept off every man, just (he said) as you would strip the dry leaves off a twig; and then seizing the ladder by the two ends, which rested against the battlements, he threw it backward into the ditch below, and so killed and wounded not a few. All praised Troilus's prowess, and Bindo in particular, for he had fought side by side with him, and seen him deal out his blows in such a way, that many of the Imperialists and Palleschi, had they have known the hand from which they received them, would have been disposed to complain, that Troilus acted the Piagnone rather too much to the life. He had indeed conducted himself like a brave and valiant soldier, for he found himself so situated, that he could not do otherwise; but he was all the time, in his heart, rebelling against the necessity he was exposed to, of perhaps killing some friend of his, or of being killed himself, and devoutly cursed Baccio Valori, who had involved him in this dilemma; and had he have observed him among the enemy, it's just possible that he might, with a ball from his arquebuss, have made him look upon his scheme of sending him to Florence, as a very unfortunate invention on his part.

To the praises thus heaped on him by Bindo, and which Niccolo heard with evident satisfaction, as it seemed to him that Troilus's conduct afforded an additional confirmation of the sincerity of his conversion, and of his love for the party that favoured liberty and democracy, the latter replied, with feigned modesty and reserve: "What merit, Sir Niccolo, can there be in fighting bravely in so holy a cause, and when we know, by evident signs, that God is on our side? And were it not that I fear it might seem as if I lent too easy a faith to certain matters, in which we must be cautious how we yield our confidence, I could almost be bold enough to declare, that I, this night, saw angels repulsing the enemy from the walls!" The cunning knave well knew that this was a notion entertained by the Piagnoni, and he had heard it whispered among the people that very night, that such a circumstance had been witnessed by many during the attack.

"God is all-powerful," replied Niccolo, "and may be it is true; but do our sins deserve so much? At all events, we are certain that God will be a shield to our weakness, and, where human strength fails, He will aid us with His arm. For so much, the blessed Savonarola is our surety, and his miracles assure us that he was inspired by God.———My sons," he resumed after a short pause, "I gave occasion of scandal this evening, I appeared to doubt!—I have been wrong, and I esteem it my duty to confess it to you, that you may not imitate my bad example, but rather continue firm in that faith, whereby at last we shall be victorious."

In a man like Niccolo, so frank a confession could not but cause him considerable pain; but he was one of those who are capable of sacrificing everything to truth; and before everything else, themselves first.

Without awaiting any reply to his words, he dismissed them for the night, intimating that it was late, and that they must want rest. When he found himself alone he opened his diary, in which he usually noted down the events of the day, and after having entered those of that evening, and fervently commended to his Maker's keeping his country, his family, and himself, the old man retired to bed, and soon fell asleep. But all beneath that roof did not succeed so readily in closing their eyes.

Lambert, having ascended into his little chamber, which he had occupied since he was quite a boy, and which was to him so full of associations, once so sweet and delightful, and now so sad, summoned his servant to help him to take off his armour. While Maurice was thus engaged, every now and then he raised his eyes to his master's face, who could not forbear, from time to time, heaving a sigh. The Swiss upon this would shake his head, and draw a deep breath, for as he did not think it becoming to be the first to enter on the matters that agitated his master's mind, he hoped by such methods to draw him into conversation; but these little artifices did not succeed, and he had already taken off his armour without his master appearing to notice these hints, or even addressing a word to him. Maurice then set about cleaning and polishing his armour, which, piece by piece, was successively ranged along the wall. When he came to the poniard, he drew it from the sheath to clean the blade; and now looking at it with the light falling on it, to mark where it required refurbishing, and now rubbing it vigorously, he cast up his eye to notice Lambert's countenance, who was already undressing himself to get into bed, and seemed quite depressed and out of spirits. When he saw him like that, he could refrain no longer, and said, without raising his eyes from his work: "I know where dis plade would hafe done goot serfice."

"And where?" asked Lambert, as a faint smile curled his lip, half penetrating Maurice's meaning.

"It would pe well put in Sir Droilus's pelly."

"Foolish fellow! put it,—put it in its sheath, and get away to bed!"

"I will go. Put Sir Droil hafe the draitor's face,—he no shentleman! I am put a poor soltier, a poor serfitor; can no speak much—put dis evening I vas going to say: No trink wine, Sir Lampert, no trink,—Put I," he added, shaking his head with a sort of sagacious air,—"I though, hafe not trunk!"

Lambert, half angry with him, half laughing at his strange German accent, and saying that a good night's rest would cure him of his foolish notions, sent him away to bed; and so he went, but still muttering: "I though hafe not trunk!" And the motive he had for insisting so earnestly on this point, we shall see by-and-by.

After Lambert had lain down, scarce half-an-hour was elapsed, when, feeling an insupportable restlessness, he got out of bed, and putting some few clothes on, he went to the window, and opening it, leant with his elbow on the sill to breathe the free air. The life of self-sacrifice that he had vowed to undergo, had begun sorrowfully for him. Let any one imagine what were likely to be his feelings, on finding himself in that very house, from which he had set out a few years before, full of love and hope, and happy with so many delightful fancies, looking out upon the very terrace, where Lisa had given him the rose, too faithful emblem of her own inconstancy. For her he had raised a barrier between himself and Laodamia, had encountered dangers and hardships, had abandoned his mother (and that too for ever!); for her, he had denied a word of comfort to the miserable girl, whom he met on the banks of the Po, poor Selvaggia, whose image, in spite of himself, ever and anon recurring to his mind, and placing itself, as it were, in comparision with that of Lisa, led him to say: "How is it that God pardons all sins, while men only pardon some? To violate our plighted faith, to betray one's country, and to abandon our parents, shall all this meet with forgiveness and indulgence? And shall a poor unhappy creature, who was betrayed by her own father, and dragged into guilt and crime in spite of herself, never again meet with mercy and compassion? Is the one to lead a miserable life, exposed to scorn and insult; the other to be welcomed and honoured, the same as the best of her sex, and to live happy and in comfort?" The thought that she was in the room below, in the arms of the man for whom she had so cruelly forsaken him, and that this too he must endure; that he had been constrained to forgive them both, overruled by so many strange and unforeseen circumstances, that even to reflect upon them seemed to him like a dream—all this was a weight too heavy for Lambert, who had not yet learnt, that every year added to the life of man, brings with it, as it approaches, a hope; and leaves sorrow and disappointment behind it. He was still at that age, when we fancy that happiness is an object, distant indeed, and difficult to be attained; but yet that it is real, attainable, and, as we may say, the ordinary condition of life; whilst unhappiness, on the contrary, is the exception. Having then now to forget the past, to renounce the dreams, and the fond aspirations of so many years, he consoled himself with the thought, I have been unfortunate, and knew not how to steer my course;—and took courage from the flattering thought, that he would regulate his future conduct, so as to ensure a happier fate. The counsels of his mother, which, in his eyes, possessed as much authority as if they had been commands from heaven, he thought, might perhaps point out to him a sure road to happiness, to that calm content of the heart, from which he felt he was now so far removed. He turned in thought to Laodamia, whom he had loved from his boyhood, as we have already noticed, even before he set his affections on Lisa; but she seemed too divine and exalted an object for such a love as his; nor would he even now have presumed to fix his thoughts on her, but for the exhortations of his mother, and the warm regard that Niccolo manifested towards him. He tried to picture to himself a new life, entirely filled with the love of her; but as his fancy pursued these images, his heart seemed checked by an obstacle, that Lambert himself could not precisely describe, but on which his thoughts were averse to dwell, as if he dreaded lest, upon probing his feelings to the bottom, he might find something that would cut off all his fresh blown hopes at a single stroke; that put it out of his power to obey his mother's injunctions, and rendered him undeserving of the angelic love of Laodamia.

This obstacle, was it real or imaginary? What was it? Not Lambert himself, we repeat, could have replied to these questions; let the reader imagine then whether we can! But perhaps the sequel of this story will furnish a reply on all these points. So now, leaving the youth to his doubts and fears, let us visit the other inmates of the house; for that night none, except Lisa, were free from oppressive cares and anxious reflections.

Laodamia, after having conducted the married pair to their chamber, had retired to her own, which was beneath Lambert's, and kneeling on her prie-dieu, before which stood an image of Our Lady, she prayed, quite absorbed in her devotions. From the thought of God, she reverted to that of her country, of her father, of her sister; and for all she implored the divine goodness, and expressed her gratitude for their escape from their late dangers. To see her at her devotions, in her calm attitude, with hands joined and eyelids lowered, and her face so pure and celestial, you would have thought that the countenance of the Holy Virgin was a copy from her own. After some minutes she rose up, and having loosed her garments, she was soon ready to lie down, observing in putting off or changing her apparel, such chastity of manner, that no eye, however modest, that saw her at such a moment, must needs have turned away. For modesty in her was not study, nor even virtue, it was nature.

She was soon asleep ; but it was not long before she was awoke by a noise, which on her first awaking, she could not tell from whence it came. Soon, however, she perceived that it proceeded from steps in the room overhead ; and her thoughts naturally turned to Lambert, recalling one by one all the circumstances that related to him, even from their infancy ; dwelling with delight on the period, at which he had consecrated to her the first dawn of his love ; for though Laodamia was modest, she was at the same time penetrating, and had quickly perceived the feelings of Lambert towards herself, and the causes which prevented the declaration of his love ; and how in course of time he was gradually attracted by the more easy and winning manners of her sister, for whom she had at once sacrificed all thoughts of herself, merely to gain for her, what she regarded as the highest object of earthly bliss. But now that circumstances were so changed, she seemed in the series of events that had transpired, to discover, as it were, a track marked out by Providence to unite her, after all, to him alone, with whom she felt she could be happy.

A conversation that Niccolo had held with her, the very evening of Lambert's arrival, confirmed her in these ideas, and persuaded her, that it was permitted to her to open her heart to new hopes. Her father on that occasion, when they were alone, taking her hand in his, had said to her—

"Laodamia, the thought that is nearest to my heart, and that most oppresses me, amid the dangers of the siege, is that which concerns your safety and welfare. For more than a year past, you have refused many very honourable alliances, that have been offered you. You, no doubt, had your reasons; into which I have no wish to intrude; but now, you see, I am an old man, and a thousand dangers surround you. I should be glad to see you supported by an arm, that could guide and protect you. I have thought of Lambert for you; it rests with you to think over the matter. If I were to command you to give your hand to him, wouldst thou obey me?"

Laodamia, who did not confound modesty with affectation, replied, slightly blushing indeed, but with the most perfect simplicity and openness—

"My dear father, I would obey you; and in such obedience, there would be but little merit."

Niccolo, who was not a little pleased at the reply, began henceforth to consider how to bring about the accomplishment of this, his darling project: and he resolved, when the feelings of Lambert had become somewhat composed, after the shock they had received, from finding on his return such a change in his circumstances, to introduce the subject himself. Laodamia, as she reflected on her father's proposal, could not help saying to herself—"It was well for me, that I did refuse those offers!" and turning, in thought, to the Madonna of Fra Angelico, which so vividly represented to her imagination the divine mother of purity, she prayed her to invoke the blessing of heaven upon her, to receive her under her protection, and ever to maintain her pure and intact, in her every action and her every thought. While breathing these prayers on her own behalf, she found herself offering similar ones for Lambert, in whom alone, as it now seemed to her, her life, her interest, and her happiness were concentrated.

With thoughts as different, and as far removed from these, as hell from heaven, as the soul of a dæmon from that of an angel, Troilus too was lying awake by the side of Lisa;—who alone, at this juncture, finding herself in possession of the summit of her desires, and looking upon her happiness as fixed for ever, was sleeping calmly and peacefully. She knew not, poor girl, that some errors never escape punishment, not even in the present life; that it sometimes tarries, indeed, but, laid by the Supreme Ruler on the track of the delinquent, it never loses sight of him, and overtakes him after long years, when perhaps he no longer recollects his having deserved it!

Troilus then, who was charged with too anxious and arduous a task, to allow him to fall asleep very speedily, and who knew how necessary it was to think over, and weigh well, every action in the difficult position in which he now found himself, was thinking to himself:—Well, here I am in the house!—the getting in has been easy enough; it remains to be seen, how I shall get out!—Body of Savonarola and all the Dominicans! what an awful look that old fellow has! I knelt before him like a child! By all the saints, I could never have imagined my doing such a thing! If they did but know this in the camp! A pretty figure I should cut; they'd laugh a trifle, I know! And that Albert, Adalbert, what do they call him?—He stood there as erect as a post, just as if he had swallowed his own yard-measure, which he once used to sell out his broad-cloth with; and he eyed me so!—He fancied, I suppose, that his very look would make me afraid! Now he has a sword at his side, he fancies himself a wonderful fine fellow! I remember him—how long ago shall I say?—when I saw him in the shop winding silk with the weavers. Why, I declare it's as good as a play! Albert!—he has assumed a fine name truly; just as if he were one of the dukes of Brandenburg! Had it not have been, that my game requires me to practise patience, I had almost read him a lesson this very evening.—But then I've robbed him of his sweetheart!—Oh, if that's all, there is between us—here she is; he may come and take her, and welcome;—I'll lend him a hand in that matter, if he requires it; and into the bargain—come, I'll not be stingy—I'll give him this brat and all; for if it be true, that boys take after their mother, in that case, when he grows up, he'll have more of the silk-weaver, than the gentleman in him.

Thus saying, he turned on poor Lisa, who was sleeping with her baby at his side, a look of loathing and disgust, which he now felt for the poor girl in no slight degree.

To some among my readers, whether male or female (if I have the good fortune to have any of the latter) it will perhaps appear impossible, that a human heart could ever become so unnatural. Happy beings! They have the bliss of not knowing all the degradation of which our nature is capable!

Pursuing the same train of thought, he added: That fellow of Ferrara, that poet, saith well—

> "The sorest burden of thys mortal lyfe,
> Is to be linkèd to a loathed wyfe."

And God knows how long it will be my fate, to enjoy this enviable condition!—Besides, to have constantly before my eyes that pretty sister of hers, who looks just like a half blown lily.—Couldn't I —find some means?—Eh! fair and softly, sir Troilus,—this is no jesting matter! It would be quite enough that the old man and her swinish brothers should get wind of it!—And yet, unless I wish to die of ennui, in this living tomb, I must divert myself somehow or other; and so, just by way of pastime—the thing is difficult, 'tis true—

but for easy conquests Troilus never had any mind,—and then if I succeed—why then, more than one in the camp there, would have to doff his cap to me, for the daughters of Niccolo de Lapi are higher game, than they can boast of in their daily chase!—Well, well, we shall see; I have succeeded with others before now. Only let this siege last awhile, and then with time and patience —and if these madmen continue the sharp work of this evening, which was no jest, there 'll be work enough to do.—Zounds! I can tell you, when our troops make their way into the great square, they will have to pitch their tent close to this house, if they want to get possession of it.—Just think how my worthy patron, Sir Niccolo, has been at work. In a twinkling, the barricade, the bridge, all reared up; the house filled with pikes and arquebusses; it seemed, for all the world, like the tower of the castle of St. Angelo in the sack of Rome. If Valori wants to take him alive, he will have to settle the business with Niccolo in person!—Presently after this soliloquy he began to feel somewhat drowsy; he continued ruminating awhile longer on his designs upon Laodamia (though, in truth, it grieves us to picture her pure image, portrayed on the mind of such a wretch, but the light of the sun is reflected even in the foulest marsh, without being polluted by it); and then turned upon his pillow and fell fast asleep.

Not long after, when it wanted about an hour to the dawn, Niccolo awoke; for, as is the case with old people, his sleep was short, and it was that night more than usually so, from his not being so far master of himself, but that the thought of having Troilus in his house occasioned him some uneasiness, and created certain undefinable fears in his mind. When he attempted to ascertain the cause of them, he could not do so, but was involved in a thousand perplexing doubts, each of which was light by itself, but all put together they became serious, and filled him with anxiety. His reunion with Lisa, his return to Florence, and his junction with the popular party, had been so coloured over, as to remove every approach to distrust; but bad men, for all their cunning and subtlety, always bear (praised be God!) an indelible mark on their brow, that more or less betrays them; and deceit, notwithstanding all its attempts to disguise itself in the garb of truth and simplicity (we beg pardon for using such an expression), has always an air about it that reveals its real character;—though to little purpose, we confess, as good men, from fear of making a mistake, and wronging the innocent, refuse to be influenced by these indications, and seek for proofs; during which, the knave overreaches them;—and such was the case with Niccolo, for, as he revolved the conduct of Troilus over and over again, he could find no specific fault with him, and so was reduced at last, to console himself with the reflection: Perhaps after all, it's only fancy, or, may be, it comes of the dislike I have hitherto felt for him—but yet I don't feel quite to like this affair. At last, like a man of spirit, who would not shrink before a hundred, much less one, he added: Well, when all comes to all, 'twill be as God ordains, and time will clear up everything;—and then, in order to divert his mind from these harassing reflections, he began to dress himself, for already the hail-Mary bell was ringing at several churches.

Having offered up his prayers at the recess, in which were placed the ashes of the friar Jerome, he lit a candle by the lamp, which burned there day and night, stirred up the fire at the hearth, and sitting down began to reflect, how to put in execution his design of marrying Laodamia to Lambert; since he thought, that by so doing, he should provide, as well as time and circumstances permitted, for the welfare and protection of his daughter. He resolved to lose no time, but to communicate his sentiments on the subject, that very day, to Lambert. He was, however, undecided whether to speak to him, or to write to him about it; but at last he determined on the former, thinking, that by this means he should more satisfactorily ascertain his real feelings; for, on no account, would he do violence to his inclinations; lest he should be in any way influenced by a desire to please him.

The day advanced by degrees, and Niccolo shortly after hearing old Mona Fede stirring, he went to the foot of the stairs, and calling her, told her to send Lambert to him as soon as he was up.

He was however already up and dressed, so that he was soon down-stairs and in Niccolo's room; who directing him to sit down beside him, and receiving him very graciouly, after a few preliminary observations, said to him: "I have a few words I wish to say to you, Lambert. If this city were not threatened with its present dangers, and were you not, as you are, one of the family, neither more nor less indeed than one of my own sons, I had never ventured to say so plainly, what I am now about to say to you. But these critical times do not admit of delay, nor is it necessary with you, that I should use much ceremony, as we know each other too well. You know, and I cannot forget, the very great obligation that I was under to your father; and you will remember, that being desirous of giving you the best proof I could of it, and also having observed your love for Lisa, I one day gave you to understand, that I was not unfavourable to your suit. Heaven has seen fit to afflict both you and me, and matters have turned out as you know. — But never mind; perhaps it was all for the best; since you deserve a better wife than this silly wench. I have too high an opinion of you, to suppose for a moment, that the slightest spark remains in your heart of the affection you once felt for her, after her treatment of you. Well then, without further preface, remember, Lambert, I have still another daughter; I leave you to think about it; and at the same time, I would have you know, that Niccolo would close his eyes in peace, if, when dying, he could be cheered with the thought, that Laodamia was not left alone and unprotected in these sad times.—I am very open with you—perhaps more so, than would be becoming in ordinary cases—do you be the same with me—remember you speak to one, who is little less than your father,—to one who will know neither peace nor happiness, so long as he does not see you happy."

Lambert's feelings, which became more and more affected by Niccolo's words, could no longer be restrained at this tender appeal. He took his hand, and pressed it to his lips; and presently replied: "Oh yes, I will be open with you, indeed!—I will tell you everything at once—without even first thanking you, as in duty bound—"

And here, commencing from the very first, when as a boy he had fixed his early love on Laodamia, he recounted to him the history of his affections, of the various feelings that had filled his mind, even up to the period of his return: he described the remorse and anguish he had endured, when he thought upon his mother; he related the conversation he had had with father Zaccaria, the letter his mother had left for him, and added:—

"Oh yes! my highest aspirations, the summit of my wishes, the only hope I could discover in the future, was, that I might one day gain the prize which you allude to. But with my mind in such a state of agitation I looked on this hope as a phantom; I distrusted it, as a dream. Oh!—

to think of ever attaining such a prize!—for, for hope to forsake a man, he must be miserable indeed!—I saw difficulties and obstacles at every point.—I was afraid to open my heart again to this passion—(what, if I were again deceived, I thought—it would be more than I could bear!)—to this passion, which, I now know, was the first, the only one in my life that can never be effaced. I thought I had stifled it—but, ah! how was I mistaken! It seems to me as if I were awaking from a long sleep. But, oh! who can be deemed worthy of Laodamia?—of such an angelic being! who could presume to hope for her love!"—

Niccolo had not for many a day felt a joy, equal to what he experienced at that moment. The enthusiastic expressions of the young man satisfied him, that the accomplishment of his fondest hopes would involve no sacrifice of personal feeling on the part either of Lambert or Laodamia, but would, on the contrary, confirm the happiness of both. He was on the point of saying, " Make yourself easy, for she loves you," but he forbore, restrained by a lofty sentiment of pride, and from a regard to his daughter, which we deem neither misplaced nor excessive. And he thought to himself,—now that the matter promises a successful issue, it will be better to leave them to a mutual explanation of their feelings. So, placing one hand on the young man's head, he said to him with a smile on his countenance—

" Eh! think you so? A smart young soldier like you, to doubt of his success? You are both my children; I must not favour one more than another; and therefore, I tell you, that if she deserves your love, you deserve hers."

"Ah!" replied Lambert, shaking his head; and relapsing into deep thought, "I wish I could think so."

But if he loved Laodamia, as indeed he did, more than he himself was aware, why was he thus thoughtful and hesitating?—If from what we have thus far endeavoured to describe respecting Lambert, the reader has succeeded in inferring the noble and delicate refinement of his mind, even on the most minute points, he will not consider the thoughts unaccountable, which then struggled in his bosom.

It was for the very reason, that his love for Laodamia had been his first passion, and the only one, which truly deserved to fill such a heart as his; and because it now revived in greater strength than ever, after the vicissitudes and accidents, which had repressed, but never extinguished it, that the generous youth was apprehensive, he could not offer her a heart so pure, so unconscious of any other affection, as he thought she deserved.

Recalling to mind Selvaggia and her sad fate, he felt moved in his inmost soul; and this righteous compassion, worthy of every noble mind, this anxious solicitude which he was conscious of feeling—how could he help feeling it?—for a poor hapless creature, who had so entirely abandoned herself to her love for him, poor Lambert confounded with feelings of another kind; and with a sigh, he thought — "Could I be such a wretch as to offer Laodamia a heart, in which there remained a vestige of the image of a ——," and he could not bear the thought, nor finish the words that were on his lips.

Distressed by these perplexing reflections the previous evening, he had not succeeded in getting the better of them, nor in distinguishing what was real from what was imaginary; for the judgment wavers and is clouded over, when the passions are in a state of agitation. But at this juncture, the heartfelt and excessive delight, caused by Niccolo's words, like a ray of light, diffused a brightness over his mind, and he could not but feel how deeply his love for Laodamia was rooted in his heart. So that in a minute or two, his countenance resuming its wonted serenity, he turned to Niccolo, who was watching him attentively, and not without some degree of astonishment, and said to him—

"The too good opinion which you entertain of me, is the very thing that makes me hesitate—but, however it be, whether I am deserving of your favour or no, I cannot rest content without your knowing more that concerns me,—in fact, knowing all. I should consider, I was acting falsely towards you, if I concealed from you a single thought—Be you my judge."

Lambert thereupon related, from the very commencement, all the circumstances with regard to

Selvaggia; he opened his heart unreservedly to Niccolo, unfolding with perfect frankness his doubts, his fears, his feelings; and the old man, who from the experience of a long life passed amongst mankind, and from his knowledge of the world, had learnt how few are they, that, in matters connected with love and the gentler sex, pay such regard to scruples like these, perceived what a treasure Laodamia would possess, if she became the wife of one, who appeared formed by heaven precisely after her own model. And when Lambert had ended what might be called his confession, the old man taking his head between his hands, embraced him with an effusion of tenderness, and said—

"Why, if I had had to make a husband for Laodamia, I could not have imagined the half of your deserts. I read in thy heart, more than thou dost thyself. Thou dost love Laodamia—and hadst thou not have felt pity for that poor unhappy girl, thou wouldst not have been the Lambert thou art.—Cheer up then, my lad, and if you can (as I doubt not you can) render your love acceptable to Laodamia, be assured, that before I die, I shall yet be able to enjoy (thanks to you) a moment of happiness, in the midst of the numerous troubles that threaten us—for I, you know, am not likely to continue here long; but of that I have not a thought, provided I know that you remain behind, as the guardian and counsellor of this house; for, Lambert, I place my confidence in you, more than in all the others!"

CHAPTER VII.

As Niccolo said this, his aspect became grave and thoughtful; and after a minute or so he resumed the conversation, by saying:—

"While we are on the subject, you must know that I rest all my hopes on you, when I shall be no longer in this world. Averardo is brave and patriotic, but he's a fiery zealot, and his furious spirit often darkens his judgment. Vieri is a good man, and a brave one too, but he is easy and indifferent. Bindo is but a boy; and now, we have this Troilus amongst us.—I don't distrust him exactly—but he was a Palleschan; his ancestors and himself, till the other day, have ever been our enemies, and the enemies of the country—he comes of a traitor's stock!—I may be wrong in mentioning my fears.—Well, at all events, Lambert, you must promise me, that henceforth you will exercise that care over this house and my children, which I took of you when a child; and that you will use, on their behalf, the discretion and good sense with which you are endowed, in a higher degree than they are. Will you promise me this, Lambert?"

"Oh, my honoured sire, think you it is necessary for me to promise? Whatever I am, and whatever I have, do I not owe it all to you?—and can you have a doubt?—"

The eyes and countenance of Lambert expressed so much earnestness in uttering these words, that Niccolo quickly replied:—

"Thou sayest true, there is no need of promises between you and me—I read your heart, and, could you do the same with regard to mine, you would see what confidence I repose in you.—If I spoke in the way I did, it was only that my words might remain ever after more vividly imprinted on your memory. Listen, then, to me. You are aware, that this house has risen to some degree of reputation, and has maintained itself securely and honourably in its position, by its attachment to the cause of liberty and religion; things which cannot subsist, the one without the other. Religion without liberty is, not religion, but deceit and hypocrisy. Did not our Saviour die alike for all? Did he not enjoin us to look on one another as brethren? Did he not condemn the violent, the proud, and those who exalt themselves on the downfall of the poor and helpless, who seize their possessions, who violate their just rights, and compel them to expend their labour and their lives merely to further their interests? And those who act thus, are they not the enemies of religion, and of liberty at the same time? And what is worst of all, they conceal their wicked designs beneath the cloak of religion. What was the conduct of the Medici and all the Palleschans? What was their motive in building convents, in establishing orders of monks, in endowing churches and hospitals? The event has shown what it was.

"Liberty, then, without religion, were it possible to establish it, could not last, but would be liable to be suppressed by any citizen, who rose above the rest, either in riches, or power; or was superior to them in talents and sagacity. For not having the restraint of religion, he would not hesitate at violence or injustice, and would soon make himself master of the State. Be it ever, then, your first care, to maintain both; for these being safe, you too will be so, and not otherwise.

"But the Palleschans are not the only enemies to be feared. I perceive there is a rumour afloat in the city, that causes me some uneasiness. The party of Niccolo Capponi, and the nobles, who are for having the government confided to the hands of a few, if they should succeed in acquiring greater influence, would cause as much injury to the popular cause, as the Palleschans and the enemy at the gates. For the present, they pretend to side with the people; but can any confidence be placed in them? At all times, and among all people, those who are great by their rank or their riches, have been ever bent on restraining the popular party, hoping by these means to increase their own advantages, or to enjoy them in greater peace and security. For these reasons, in all civic changes and commotions they have ever been more disposed towards tyranny than liberty. It will be advisable, to keep a watchful eye on these men. I have already had some conversation, on this point, with some of my political friends; and I find they are of the same opinion. At present, I just hint the matter to you, so that some day, when you may perhaps hold some magisterial office in the State, (by which time, thank Heaven, this siege will be raised, and the city be free and happy; though I shall be no more,) should it happen, I say, to you, to be one of the rulers of the people, may these admonitions of Niccolo recur to your mind, and may you use them for your country's welfare. And, Lambert, let me tell you, that with a people, who have been so demoralized as ours have, good laws and institutions avail little or nothing, unless the rich and powerful are forbidden to form themselves into sects and parties. What, in fact, is the use of requiring, for the election of rulers and magistrates, and of all those who are to make and administer the laws, the votes of free men, if the poor sell themselves, and the rich and powerful buy them? Therefore, I repeat, beware of these men; for they are the most dangerous foes to freedom: at first, they cannot be restrained, because not openly culpable; and at last, because too powerful."

In the old man's words, there was something so confidential and tender, that Lambert, half amazed, and half affected by it, did not move a muscle, but stood in an attitude of respectful attention. At this point, however, he could not help exclaiming: "Gracious heaven! if this were your last hour, Sir, you could not talk in a different strain. Oh! why hold such language to me? I am not very likely ever to occupy any position of authority in Florence; but should such an event some day come to pass, there will be time enough (thank God!) for you to direct and instruct me by your counsels."

"May be there will; but it is just possible there may not. However, I think it as well to suggest these matters to you now; for now you seem more than ever my son.—My good Lambert, I see that my words distress you—they sound like parting admonitions;—God knows, your love is grateful to my heart; but just now it is the time for manly thoughts, not for tender emotions. Sooner or later, we must all bid the world farewell; the precise time is of little consequence; but I am anxious that death may not come upon me, before I have done all that lies in my power for the security of my family and my country. Now go, and heaven attend you with its choicest blessings!"

Lambert withdrew from the room, his heart swelling with gratitude, and entertaining, if possible, a more profound veneration for Niccolo; and with his thoughts intent on Laodamia, he was forming a thousand schemes, with a view of at once and explicitly declaring his love to her. He would have gone in search of her that very instant, had not a summons arrived for all to repair to the parade-ground and join their gonfalon, for some reason or other of no great moment. The young men, therefore, all sallied forth, and were not able to return during the whole of that day.

But before the evening, it happened that Laodamia found herself alone with her father; who did not keep from her the conversation he had had with Lambert; and, in the joy of his heart, told her, she might be quite easy about his love. A radiant joy, so calm, so pure, diffused itself over Laodamia's countenance at this announcement, that told better than words could do, how divine a thing love is, when no guilt pollutes it, no fears sadden it, and no remorse embitters it. She raised her glistening eyes to heaven, with her hands clasped and pressed to her bosom, in an attitude full of tenderness and feeling. In her heart, gratitude to heaven, and her love for Lambert blended into a single emotion, indescribable and deep, which for a moment changed her natural paleness into a light carnation, as with tremulous voice she said: "Poor Lambert! I knew so!"

Niccolo pressed his daughter to his heart, and kissed her, and then presently added:—

"But I would not disclose to him, what I had read in your heart, nor tell him that you loved him."

Laodamia raised her eyes, and with a look of surprise and astonishment, said in a tone of the utmost simplicity, so as to excite a smile on the old man's countenance:—

"And why not tell him, since it's true? Poor Lambert! he would have thought it so kind."

"He will hear it with more pleasure from your own lips," replied the old man; and then taking her hand, he continued, with a kindly expression on his countenance, which appeared the more affecting from his habitual austerity:—

"My dear Laodamia, you are arrived at the most important point in a woman's life. Now, more than ever, it would be well for you if your mother were alive; but, my love! you have lost her!—though from heaven she can bless and pray for you; and so far as I cannot fully supply her place, may the deep affection I have for you, or rather her spirit from on high inspire me with such counsels, as may now most contribute to your welfare. Thou seest the dangers that surround our country; in happier times, to be the wife of a man like Lambert, would promise you a life of peace and enjoyment; as it is, I pray God, and with what sincerity He well knows, to bless you, and to visit on my head every misfortune, provided you escape it.—But will my prayer be heard?—In the midst then of the troubles that threaten this city, arm yourself with courage, Laodamia; it is more than probable that you will need it. Be prepared for all events, and so fortify your mind, that you may, in all, show yourself worthy of your faith, of your country, and of the blood that runs in your veins, and which (thank God) I transmitted to you free and unstained——"

Here the old man's countenance changed all on a sudden;—a shade passed over it; and, knitting his brows, and clenching his hand in a threatening attitude, he exclaimed:—

"Ah, Lisa, Lisa! were it not for you, this boast might have been more complete."

At that moment, he felt the impress of Laodamia's warm lips on his cold hand, and a tear at the same time trickled over it;—but soon recovering his composure, he continued:—

"And in order to show yourself a worthy daughter of your country, an occasion may arise which will try you severely, Laodamia! Your first thought, your chief affection, henceforth, ought to be for Lambert; but even to him you must prefer God and your country, which, in a certain sense, are one and the same; for the good of the one is never dissociated from the will of the other. Remember, my child, that we live in days when, for the general welfare, that Lambert, whom you love, who will by-and-by be the father of your children, who will be your only support,—your only comfort, when I am gone,—you must bear to see encountering wounds, and death itself, with an unmoved eye! Nay, you must yourself incite him to dare dangers! You must think, every time he leaves you, perhaps this will be the last! You must not weep, nor sigh, nor indulge your feelings, nor seek a parting kiss; you must not address to him those words, which rise hastily and involuntarily from the heart at such moments, but which impair and take the heart out of courage, by reminding him of the sweets and pleasures of life, when, of all times, it most behoves a man to hold them in contempt.

"When one's country is in danger, it exacts a great deal from men, but sometimes even more from women; of the one it claims their blood, and their life; of the others, that of those dearest to them. The first encounter death in the heat of the conflict, before the eyes of their fellow-citizens and their enemies, spurred on by rage, and stimulated by the love of their country and a thirst for glory; whilst those of your sex, all alone, in the silence of their deserted homes, must hear the distant sound of blows, the shouts of the combatants, and think at every instant:—Now perhaps a husband, a father, or a brother is falling.—Of the two, then, which has the greater need of fortitude and self-possession?——What, Laodamia, are you weeping?—It was not to distress or alarm you, that I have described the trials to which you will be exposed, but in order that you may know, what are the duties of woman in a free state; that you may think well over them, and thence come to know how sacred and essential they are; that you may arm your mind with patience, and fit it, gloriously to fulfil them; and at the same time, let the proud thought sustain you, that in order to uphold a people's liberty, to give birth to great and generous actions, women possess unbounded influence, provided they know how to use it, and will do so; and of you I am persuaded, that you have both the power and the inclination."

"Oh yes, yes, my dear father!—I will not give way. These my tears flow not from my want of firmness—I am, you know, your daughter! But then—I don't wish to appear to have more fortitude than I really have—to think that God gives me Lambert to-day,—and perhaps to-morrow——"

Here her voice was choked by her sobs, and her lips quivered with emotion; but at last, with some attempt at a smile, she said: "Ah! never fear for me, father dear. God will give me strength! And since you think woman good for something, it shall not be your daughter Laodamia, who shall rob you of this opinion. We are not here in this world merely to enjoy life, but to suffer whenever, and whatever it may please God."

"You have nobly said, my child. In this life our true and only wisdom consists, not in disquieting ourselves by pursuing the phantom of happiness—which, the more eagerly we follow after it, the further it seems to fly from us—but in composing and familiarising the mind to the idea of suffering. And, as an implicit resignation to suffering, without a prospect of being requited, is contrary to our nature, and an impossibility in itself, he who would find peace here below, and be able to support the evils and miseries of life, has nothing to rest upon but the hope of future reward. If this hope alone influenced mankind, the world would not be in the power of the violent, the ambitious, and the unjust; and liberty, now crushed, would soon rise again. But," continued the old man, with a smile, "I was going to talk to you of yourself, and of your affairs; and instead of that, I find myself talking of affairs of state!—However, my life is fast drawing to its close; the thought of my country weighs heavy at my heart, and my mind at times can think of nothing else, in spite of myself. At any rate, even with regard to what concerns you, I have said enough, and I feel that you fully understand me. Now cheer up, and Heaven grant that you may not be exposed to too severe a trial."

This dialogue took place while, as we have said, there was no one in the house but Niccolo and his daughters. Lisa, who was upstairs with her child, saw, when Laodamia came back to her, that she had been crying, and felt certain that something had been the matter. She pressed her with all sorts of questions, and learnt from her sister all her hopes and prospects—in fact, the whole of her recent conversation with her father. Laodamia spoke with that confidential warmth and openness, which arises from the need we feel of unbosoming ourselves to those we love, and communicating to them the secret gladness of our heart, and was too intent on what she was saying—too excited, and also, perhaps, too ingenuous, too simple-minded, to notice the effect produced by her words on the mind of her sister.

Lisa listened to her with a smile, which she wished to appear one of kindness and congratulation. The reader is aware what a wayward girl she was. Taken thus unawares, she felt wounded in her tenderest point by the thought, that Lambert's love for her had vanished much more speedily than it was reasonable to expect, and had not therefore been so deep as she had fancied, and as she thought was due to her merits. This idea was doubly galling to her vanity, because she could not hide from herself, how mean the motive was which gave rise to it. There is no greater mortification for the proud, than that of finding themselves despicable and ridiculous in their own opinion; and such mortification was depicted painfully and distinctly on Lisa's countenance. It lasted, however, but a moment; and luckily, it was not noticed by Laodamia; for Lisa, more to impose upon herself than to delude her sister (at least, so we would hope, for her sake), lavished a thousand caresses and endearments upon her, after the first moment had passed away; and endeavouring to persuade herself that she was really and sincerely interested for the happiness of the two lovers, and beyond measure delighted at the proposed union, she succeeded at last in appearing, and perhaps in really being, sincere and unaffected in her congratulations.

Sisters and young girls want not for words on such occasions. On the present, their conversation abounded in projects and plans for the future; which we shall not repeat, for the very excellent reason, that they would be too long for us to write and for others to read. At length they separated, after mutual embraces and expressions of joy. No sooner was Laodamia gone out, than Troilus entered his wife's apartment.

Whoever had seen him mounting the stairs, would have been inclined to say:—that man is heartily sick and tired of his present occupation. He was coming up as slowly as he well could, dragging one foot after the other, with the air of a man who is doing a thing against his will; he was also lugging a halberd along after him, which he grasped by the iron head, so that with the butt end it struck successively on the edge of every stair. Arrived at the landing, he began puffing and blowing, which lasted for some time; and with his eyebrows arched upward, his eyes on the ground, and his head leaning listlessly on one side, and humming a tune, he hung up his halberd in its place on the wall; he then relieved his arm of the shield, which it bore, and was attempting to place it down in an upright position against the wall, but it slid down, without his troubling himself to stoop and pick it up. He then entered Lisa's room, forcing himself to assume the most cheerful aspect he could, and encouraging himself by saying:—Come, Troilus, courage, my lad; all this dull work will not be without its reward!

"I thought we were going out to fight," he said, kissing his wife with a mere lip-embrace; "but it was nothing but a muster,—nothing stirring, no news."

"There's plenty of news at home instead," replied Lisa.

"What are they?"

"Lambert is engaged to Laodamia."

"Ah!—Indeed?—Oh! I am very glad to hear it!"

Then looking intently at Lisa, and readily divining her thoughts, he added, glad of an opportunity for exercising his natural malignity: "Oh! capital truly!—Why, I should never have thought it!—Who in the world would ever have imagined, that those two were in love with each other? They must have been driving at this for a good while, I warrant."

Lisa bit her lips, and gave a shrug of the shoulders; whilst Troilus continued: "Well, I declare, I'm very glad—for to tell you the truth, with regard to this Albert,—Lambert I mean—I felt some uneasiness—although I had no intention of hurting him—yet I have been the means of crossing his love—and no one ought to pity him more than myself, for I know the value of the treasure he has lost—"

At this moment, Lisa's head being turned away, he put out his tongue a good inch or two.

"Now, I thank God at seeing he is not quite driven to depair.—And for you too, my sweet Lisa, I am not a little delighted. I am sure—to your kind heart—it must have been a heavy blow—and you must find it a great consolation to see him so happy, and to think he has known how to make so good a use of his understanding, and to comfort himself—"

"Oh! as far as I am concerned, I am extremely delighted," said Lisa drily.

Troilus planted himself right opposite to her, and looking fixedly in her face, said: "And yet to see how you look, one would fancy that you were anything but delighted. May be there is something else, that displeases you—"

"No, nothing at all, I assure you—I feel as I usually do."

"Oh! as you usually do,—no, my dear Lisa. Why not say at once:—I don't wish to tell you? —Why your mortification is visible in your face; one might see it a mile off."

"But what have I to be mortified about?—and with whom?"

"Why, that's the very thing I wanted to know —for I cannot even imagine what it can be.—But whatever it is, I should have thought that at such a moment, seeing your sister so pleased, and Lambert so happy and contented, it would give you such joy, as to make you forget everything else."

At these words, the bitter irony of which she deeply felt, without having the relief to be derived from replying to them in direct terms, Lisa was so teased and worried, she could scarce contain herself; and stamping her foot impatiently on the ground, she rose up, and saying two or three times: "Well, but if I tell you then, there is nothing the matter with me!" at last burst into tears.

Troilus secretly enjoying this scene, which, as we shall find, favoured his designs, stood looking at her with feigned surprise, and kept saying: "I really can't understand.—What *is* the matter? What has come to you?"

"Nothing's the matter with me—you come here with such a face, and look at me in such a strange way—and then say: *What's the matter?—I am sure something is the matter—and you won't tell me* —You almost drive me out of my mind—it's a great worry—"

"Worry! Oh, I like to hear you talk so! which is as much as to say, Get out of my way. If that's all you want, we shall be very soon agreed."

So saying, he turned his back on his wife, who, all changed in a moment, and alarmed at the idea of having offended him, whom she really so fondly loved, she hurried forward to stop him; but in vain; for Troilus violently releasing his arm from her grasp, was a moment after in the street. He had no sooner heard of Lambert's intended marriage, than it came into this villain's mind to prevent it at all hazards; for in the event of its taking place, there was an end to all his designs upon Laodamia; designs, which at present were scarcely matured, and which he knew would prove so very difficult of accomplishment, that probably he would have abandoned them altogether, had it not have been, that to see her in the grasp of another, gave a fresh stimulus to his vile appetite. Determined not to be baulked, therefore, and knowing that no time was to be lost, he availed himself of the opportunity, purposely to get up the quarrel with his wife which we have just detailed, so that his quitting the house, and leaving her so suddenly, appeared quite natural.

As he walked along, not being in the least degree in the passion he pretended, and which he had only feigned for the occasion, he laughed to himself and said:—"I wouldn't have lost this amorous quarrel for a trifle! Why truly, it couldn't have happened more opportunely! Now, Sir Troilus, it's for you to turn it to good account! The first thing to be done is, to send Lambert to the right-abouts.—But how? That's the point."

At that moment he bethought himself of Benedetto de Nobili, and of what he had told him, about the cave of St. Jerome, and of the means by which he could confer secretly with him; and thought that he might possibly avail himself of his assistance. In a few minutes he was at the office of the above-named confraternity, and having explained who he was to one of the elders, who, from his acquaintance with Niccolo and his family, had heard the report of all that had happened of late, he got himself enrolled among the brothers without any difficulty. He paid the small sum required for admission, gave the usual compliment to the sacristan, and having received the habit of the order, he made it up into a bundle, and set out with it in high glee, to return homeward.

In the meantime, Lambert with the rest had already returned. He at once made his way to his room, and hastily doffing his armour, it appeared to him an age, ere he could go in search of Laodamia, to whom, he felt that he dared at last open his heart, with a sense of security and confidence, and make amends to himself for his long silence, and for the suspense and anguish he had undergone on her account. He descended to the room below, not without having first bestowed more than ordinary care on his personal appearance, so that his dress, his hair and beard might be tastefully arranged; and he even cast a hasty glance before quitting his room, in the mirror that hung on the wall; but in the very act of doing so, conscious of this little feminine vanity, he could not suppress a smile at his folly; and then away he went.

Coming to the door of Laodamia's room, he found it ajar. He knocked very gently, calling her by her name, his heart beating violently all the while. As no one answered, he pushed open the door and entered. The room was empty. Although he had been in it many times before, yet this seemed to him the first; he felt a slight shudder run through him, that he had never experienced before, and continued for a moment looking round at the walls and furniture, which was all so neatly arranged, as to show plainly, by what tidy hand it was kept in such exact order. The air of the apartment was perfumed with the fragrant scent of flowers, which ornamented the image of the Virgin, and the sweet wholesome smell of the linen which covered the bed. The light, which was now inclining to dusk, fell languidly on the floor; and its sombre tint was coloured with the reddish flame that gleamed from the lamp, that was burning above the prie-dieu.

Lambert, coming forward, fixed his eyes on the image of Our Lady, which had never before appeared to him resplendent with so divine a beauty; he contemplated, for a moment, what might be called the sanctuary of Laodamia's most secret thoughts, those flowers, those prayer-books, those cushions which bore the impression of her loved form. All these things, that to anybody else, would have been mute and lifeless, had for him both life and speech; which, sweet and thrilling, penetrated to the very depths of his heart.

Deeply absorbed in his impassioned reverie, Lambert almost unconsciously bent his knees before the image, resting his arm on the cushion, and supporting his head with his hands. The rapid and violent palpitations of his heart were gradually subsiding, and were giving way to a serene and indescribable lull of the soul, when he felt a hand laid gently on his shoulder, and heard the voice of Laodamia sounding sweetly in his ear: "What, you here, Lambert? And for whom are you praying?"

The young man raised his head, and turned round towards her; what his feelings were at that moment, how he remained fascinated by the gaze of those glistening eyes, that were bent on him so tenderly, may be imagined, but cannot be described. Without moving from where he was, he took Laodamia's hand within his own, and pressing his lips to it, replied with tremulous emotion—

"I came to pray for you; and what the nature of my prayer is, and the feeling of the heart, that prompts it, you very well know, Laodamia!"

"Yes, I do know," she replied; but her eyes gave a more complete and a more tender reply. Without another word, she knelt down by Lambert's side, who still held her hand, and with her eyes fixed on the face of our Blessed Lady, after a brief silence, she said: "Holy Mary! if Lambert's heart should ever be estranged from me, let me die first!"

Neither uttered a word. To speak at such a moment was not possible; nor was it necessary, in the case of two hearts, that blended into one, as quickly as two flames unite, when placed in contact.

When, after a long pause, they both recovered their power of speech and thought, Laodamia, unable any longer to support herself on her knees, sat down on a chair close by her: a sweet and ecstatic languor spread, like a veil, over her eyes, which, as they fell slowly and softly on her lover, who was still kneeling at her feet, told him of the bliss she felt, with the frank and confiding assurance of a guileless and innocent love. It seemed to both, as if they had been born to a new life, had emerged into a new scene of existence, and (I was about to say) had changed their very nature; no thought of the past, no anxiety for the future; a mutual interchange of souls, without the utterance of a word, except that from time to time they could not help asking each other, whether all this was a reality, and not a dream. Whilst Laodamia, all the while, affecting to withdraw her hand from Lambert's too ardent kisses, was pressing it against his face, and with feeble force made a show of keeping him off.

Presently, as their ideas began by degrees to settle in their wonted channel, and as they reviewed the feelings and events of their past life in connexion with their present happiness, they talked of a thousand minute circumstances of their childhood, their first thoughts, the first emotions of their hearts in early youth; and mutually asked and gave explanations of words, that had been studiously obscure, of looks and actions, and a thousand trifles, that had occurred years back, but which were still living and present to the memory of the heart. In these confidential communications, Lambert introduced, at every sentence, the tenderest epithets, which he addressed to Laodamia in ever-varying forms of expression; epithets which cannot be repeated, having been profaned and rendered ridiculous by the tribe of Arcadian poets; but which are not, on that account, less needful, as a vent to the heart, when its feelings are beyond what can be expressed by words of ordinary use.

"Oh, my Laodamia, my darling!" said the young man, "sole object of my thoughts, you now make me conscious of my past error—I who thought I had felt what love was!—Oh! I never imagined it could rise to such ecstasies.—Do you know—not long ago, I was quite wretched to think that I could ever have diverted my affections to Lisa.—I felt as if I had wronged the love I bore to thee—which was the first, the only passion I ever felt in my life;—now I feel myself worthy to use such a word—now I know, that I but fancied I loved another—it was not true—Oh! how delighted I am to think—that I was mistaken—I never loved but you alone, with that love, which you alone deserve, and which is yours only—and will be, as it ever has been, yours, in my inmost heart, so long as my life shall last.—But can you imagine how this thought inspires me with a new life?—To think that I have not that stain upon my heart, which would render me unworthy of your love? that the celestial look of my Laodamia can light on me serene and pure—her thoughts repose on my heart without resting on an object too lowly for them?"—

CHAPTER VIII.

While engaged in this delightful colloquy, all alone, the shades of evening had fallen around them, and the room, illuminated only by the light of the lamp, was in a state of semi-darkness; which, at any other time, would have suggested to the two young people the necessity of providing themselves with a more cheerful light, but on the present occasion they were quite unconscious of it. The family were already assembled in Niccolo's room, on the ground floor, for the evening devotions, and Lambert and Laodamia not being there, Vieri had gone to the foot of the stairs to call them. His voice was tolerably loud, and resounded in every part of the house except in the ears of the two lovers, who were not even aware of anything of the kind, and so Vieri, wasting no further thoughts upon them, returned to the fireplace, where the rest were seated, whilst Lambert continued: "Oh, beloved! you know not in what anguish I have lived owing to these thoughts!—now I will tell you all—as there ought not to be a thought in my heart not known to you."

Hereupon he told her all about Selvaggia, the memory that still clung to his heart of her, the pity he still felt for her; and while he spoke, he anxiously and tremblingly watched the impression, which his words produced on Laodamia. When he had finished his narration, he said: "Now you know all, my dearest. Don't you think I was right in holding myself unworthy of your angelic affection? Do I still seem worthy of a single thought of yours? Oh, pray answer me, Laodamia!" And with the trembling suspense of a prisoner who dreads the announcement of his doom, he awaited her reply.

The countenance of Laodamia, on which at first a light shadow seemed to rest, was calm and serene; whilst, with a slight sigh (perhaps it arose from the thought that Lambert's heart had not been always and entirely her own), she replied: "Tell me, Lambert, if this poor creature had not been so abject and lowly, if you could have loved her with honour, would she have been dearer to you than your Laodamia?"

Lambert grasped his hair in an attitude of horror, as if he could not find words to express his feelings at the mention of such a doubt; but his manner, and the expression of his countenance, said enough, so that she went on to say:—

"Well, God accepts even those hearts, that once were not His! Even He deigns to succeed to the affections, that once were bestowed on other objects! And should not I, a weak and feeble creature, be satisfied with as much? Should I raise my pretensions higher? Ah! no, Lambert, my pride is not capable of such absurdity. I do not complain of the past; indeed I have no reason to do so—but even if I had, I will think of it no more. But the future!—Lambert, the future!" And here clasping her hands together in an attitude of entreaty, she said: "You see, Lambert, I am a weak and feeble girl, who confides entirely in your love; for that, I can summon up the courage and fortitude, that may be necessary in every event of the perilous life we may have to undergo, in these days of fighting and bloodshed. No danger, no misfortune, shall ever so far subdue my spirit, as to give you cause to blush for me.—This I have vowed to God, and to my father—and this vow I feel I can keep—for I feel that I am a Christian, born among a free people, and the daughter of Niccolo de Lapi. But, Lambert, one thing only do I implore of you—never love any one but me!—I, you see, feel myself strong against every ill that may betide me, but against this!—oh! I could never be!—The life of us women, all passes in the heart, you know. With us, love is not a mere pastime—nor simply a relief from heavier cares! That heart, which but a while ago you offered me, is now my only treasure, and the only object of my thoughts; oh! do not deprive me of it, whilst I live!"—

What Lambert felt at these tender words, he could express in no other way than by covering with kisses the hand, which now freely resigned, no longer attempted to withdraw from his own.

Presently raising his head, and feeling in his bosom, he drew forth his mother's letter, which he always had with him, and told Laodamia to read it; which she did, bathing it with tears of tender regard; and, as he took it back, he said: "You see, what were the feelings my poor mother had for you: you see how she blessed me in her last hour. Now hear me, Laodamia!—If ever I could be such a wretch, as to wrong you even in thought, may this blessing turn into——" But he could not finish what he was going to say, for Laodamia's hand was placed on his lips to check him.

"Oh! Lambert, utter not such words; Heaven reproves them—it is enough for me to read your heart. Oh! yes, I read there that our love will never end, not even in heaven, where we shall love one another for ever, absorbed in the love of Him, who created us for the express purpose of making us eternally happy." And her eyes were directed upwards, with that unearthly expression, which rises sometimes beneath the delicate touch of the pencil of Guido Reni.

It was not long before the thought of Selvaggia again recurred to Laodamia. Her remorse, her wretchedness had touched her heart; she wished to hear a more particular account of the events of her life; and when her wish had been complied with, she exclaimed:—

"Oh! poor creature!—oh! what wretches there are in the world!—what must she not have suffered, and what may she not, even yet, have to suffer!

Ah! yes—to love you, my dearest Lambert, and not to have the shadow of a hope!—oh, dreadful!—But at least we might find out where she is! we might seek for her, and administer some consolation—and let her know for once the sweets of being beloved, if not of love;—the joy of affection and friendship at all events might be hers!"

"Where she now is, God only knows—but—(I would not say so to anybody else, but to you, Laodamia, I may)—in my opinion, she is not likely to lose sight of me.—Why, if I did not respond to her love, at all events I spoke to her with kindness; and as I showed some pity for her, accustomed, as she was, to meet only scorn and insult, it seemed to her as if for once, she had met a being, with the form and feelings of a man."

"Oh! how delighted I should be to find her!—I—to know that my happiness renders one poor creature so miserable—it wrings my heart—I feel as if it were something, for which I ought to beg her forgiveness—and in some way or other, to make her amends for this wrong. Oh, Lambert!—let us find her; I will be a friend, a sister to her; she shall no longer have to say, that no one in the wide world is kind to her!"

"Paradise itself contains not such an angel as thou art!" exclaimed Lambert in ecstasies; and on Laodamia's brow, delicate and pure like the breast of a dove, the young man imprinted the first kiss of love.

Niccolo, all this time, observing that Lambert and Laodamia did not appear, half guessed the cause of their absence; and in order to satisfy himself, he stopped Vieri, who was going to call them once more, and insisted on going to fetch them himself. He went up-stairs, and approaching Laodamia's door, which was half-open, so that he could enter without being heard, he caught the last words and saw the action of Lambert. The old man was so happy, at seeing his chief earthly desire likely to be fulfilled, that contrary to his nature, he, for the moment, assumed a jesting tone, and made the two young people start, by repeating the last words which Lambert had uttered,—

"*Oh! I can never deserve the love of such a being! I can never be worthy of such an angel!* Poor Lambert! why I am really beginning to doubt, whether you are in your senses."

Then resuming his usual manner, but with the tenderest emotions, he clasped them both to his heart at once; for they, laughing and blushing, had instantly started to their feet. Holding them thus, he led them towards the image of the Virgin, and bidding them kneel down, he placed his hands on their heads, and said:—

"My children! you, who have ever been good and dutiful; who are the joy and crown of my old age, I give you my blessing. I bless your mutual love, your children and their posterity! When I shall be no more—and that will be soon—remember your father Niccolo; remember the love he bore you, and the benediction he gave you this day; and if you would, that God above should ratify it, love one another always as you now do—but love God and your country first; and so it will be vouchsafed to us at last, to meet and be for ever united in the mansions of heaven."

When he had ended, for several minutes not a word was uttered by either, filled as they were with a feeling of religious veneration and tender gratitude for the words they had just heard. At last, Niccolo made a motion to go, by saying:—"Well let us go down-stairs, for they're waiting for us." Going down together into the room, where the rest of the family were assembled, and who had heard the whole story from Lisa, they were received with a smile; for the company observed Laodamia's cheeks to be rather more flushed than usual, and on Lambert's countenance, usually grave, an unwonted expression of joy was diffused, in which all three participated indeed; but which appeared still more novel on the stern brow of the aged Niccolo. Whilst he was out of the room, their friends, who usually visited them in the evening, had come in; and among the rest Fanfulla, who had now become quite one of the family.

Niccolo informed the company of the engagement of the young couple; on which there followed the usual embraces and congratulations. The espousals were fixed for the evening of the next day, in St. Mark's Church, according to the ancient custom of the city; for the betrothed were, no less than Niccolo, indisposed for any further delay.

Niccolo invited all who were present to a homely supper, on their return from the church; not such, he said, as he should have wished for on the occasion, but such as the present troubles would admit of. Then turning to Father Benedict, he begged he would be so good as to celebrate the marriage rites by pronouncing the nuptial benediction, which were fixed to take place three days afterwards in the same church.

"Oh, Lisa! where is Troilus, that he is not here this evening?" he said turning to his daughter, who was occupied at a table in another part of the room.

Lisa replied that he had that very day enrolled himself in the Society of the Cave of St. Jerome, and that he was now gone there, and would not return till late.

"Very well," said Niccolo, who was not just then inclined to give ear to suspicions, nor disposed to uncharitable interpretations; and being exceedingly happy at finding himself in the midst of those nearest to him, he thought no more of Troilus, nor of anything else; and so the evening passed away.

But Troilus did not fail to think about them. Having returned home with his bundle, and made matters up with his wife, who, poor girl, had been all the while in the greatest alarm and distress, taking upon herself the entire blame of their disagreement, the first that had occurred between them since they had been together, he waited till it was dark; and then putting on the habit of the fraternity, he directed his steps towards the Porte San Gallo, where their oratory was situated. Having arrived at the door, and being recognised by the person who let them in, he was admitted, and descended several steps which conducted him into a small chapel, which, from being underground, was called the Cave. He found himself in a long, low, vaulted chamber, disposed in the form of a cross by huge erect pillars of unhewn stone, all blackened by time and the smoke from the torches. The pavement, consisting of large slabs of stone, was marked here and there with tombs, on which were represented the sculptured effigies of warriors and civilians, clothed in long tunics; but the bas-relief was almost worn away by the long-continued trampling of the feet. On the altar, at the further end, several candles were burning before the picture of St. Jerome, which was painted on a board in three compartments, after the ancient manner, all carved and gilt. A great quantity of votive offerings, which, according to the custom of the time, consisted of large figures, of the size of life, representing the devotees of both sexes, with the dresses on, they used to wear when alive, hung aloft, suspended to the roof. This aerial population, resembling in every respect, but that of life, those beneath them, had an indescribably strange and comical appearance, and their dark and shadowy forms, as seen by the lights upon the altar, seemed just like so many phantasms, called forth from the tombs below. Deep nasal voices were chanting in a drawling tone the canonical hours, behind the altar; and throughout the church, kneeling close to the wall, were several of the brothers of the Order, closely wrapped in their habit, with the cowl drawn down over their eyes.

To Troilus, who was used only to balls and banquets, and the various kinds of diversion, and who had perhaps never been in a church a dozen times in his life, it seemed just as if he had descended into a tomb. He advanced forward, taking care not to slip, for the pavement was overlaid with a damp mould, like all underground places, and stopping for a moment, he looked round, and said:

"Just fancy! it's rather odd, that one must take these kind of short cuts to get to Paradise!—Patience!—you must go through with it, Sir Troilus! Ah, Baccio Valori, you dog, we shall meet again, please God!—But now, how am I to find out that villain, Benedetto de Nobili, in the midst of those coal-sacks, that are all huddled together there? Let me see. That fellow who seems to be squatting down in a corner——Yes!—no!—he is too tall by a foot! Ah, that other fellow there, with his rounded haunches, like a knight's charger!—That's he, I'm sure."

He approached him, and knelt down by his side; and having given, and received in reply, the signal agreed on between them, he found he had guessed rightly, and so they began to whisper together in a low tone.

Troilus, in order to attain his object more certainly and more readily, came at once to the point; and without further preface, said to Sir Benedetto, that he would on no account remain any longer in Florence, to lead such a friar's life ; that it was a miserable existence, and would kill him in a week; and that, therefore, he should give Valori to understand, that he would leave the city at all hazards. Sir Benedetto said all he could think of, to prevail on him to change his mind ; while the other still continued obstinate. At last, after talking a long while, he let an expression drop, to the effect that he would be very willing to remain, if one condition were granted him.

"Be it what it may, if only it be practicable, it shall be complied with," replied Sir Benedetto, promptly.

"Well, listen," said Troilus. "You must exert your influence with Malatesta, that by to-morrow, Lambert, a soldier belonging to Amico d'Arsoli's company, and whose quarters are at the house of Niccolo de Lapi, may be sent out of Florence along with the rural bands, or wherever you like, as that is of little consequence, so that he be got out of the way."

"If that's all you want, my fine fellow, it shall be done, and quickly, too," returned Benedetto, who fancied he had made an easy bargain. "But," he continued, "it strikes me that, as we are disguised in this way, the best thing will be to go at once to Malatesta and settle this business. For the present, keep still, and not quite so close, for fear of rousing suspicion."

Troilus, highly delighted, smiled in his heart at his simplicity, in thinking he had any intention of really withdrawing from a scheme, in which he was now beginning to feel interested; and removing from him a short distance, he bent down his head in an attitude of feigned devotion, but all the while secretly revolving his villainous projects.

An hour or two thus passed, which, owing to his uncomfortable position, and the aching of his knees, that had never before borne the whole weight of his body, appeared three or four hours at least. At last he perceived that the candles on the altar were being extinguished one by one. He raised his head, and having seen the last light vanish beneath the extinguisher, all remained in darkness; except that behind the altar, a small lamp emitted a feeble glimmer.

He presently observed a shadowy form advancing towards him along by the wall, which stopped at every one; apparently giving something or other into their hands. He approached nearer to Benedetto, in order to inquire what all this meant; when the man who was thus engaged, came up to him, and placed in his hand a piece of wood about two spans long, which he could not in the dark exactly distinguish; but on feeling it, he found there were certain knotted thongs fastened at one end, and that he held in his hand a scourge or discipline. He was on the point of using it vigorously on the back of the man, who had given it him; but he checked himself; and Benedetto, who kept his eye on him, said in an under tone: "Do as you see me do." Troilus, on turning to observe him, saw Benedetto, who had stript off all his clothes above his waist, and stood with his bare arms and shoulders, take up the scourge, and begin lashing himself; which, it will be readily believed, was attended with more noise than effect; and the rest of the fraternity did the same, reciting the *Miserere*, all the while.

Troilus felt his choler rise, at having suffered himself to be caught in this trap, of which Benedetto had given him no intimation; so taking the scourge in his hand, without undressing himself any further, he said: "You shall pay me an instalment at once, without waiting for to-morrow." And striking about at random on the walls and benches, he dealt a smart lash or two on Sir Benedetto's shoulders, which made him sensibly aware of the difference between inflicting the scourge with his own hands, and its being done by another's. Feeling himself struck, he turned round like a viper; whilst Troilus, laughing in his sleeve, excused himself on the score of the darkness of the place, and his inexperience in such exercises.

At last, as it grew late, having finished their devotions and their austerities, the brothers began to depart, one by one; and when the church was empty, our two cavaliers, making their way upward to the street, directed their steps to Malatesta's palace.

Since we can pass over at a bound the street, which it took them half-an-hour to traverse, we shall, with our reader, precede them, and anticipate their arrival; and we shall take up our position to wait for them, in some rooms on the ground-floor; from which, by a secret staircase, there was a communication with Malatesta's bedroom. These ground-floor rooms were tenanted by Master Barlaam, his physician and astrologer; whom, we hope, the reader has not forgotten, although it is now a long time, since we have mentioned him. Another stranger too, who has already been introduced in the course of our story, had appeared on the scene, in these same rooms, not more than twenty-four hours ago.

But before we detail the present circumstances of this person, we must fill up the blank we have left, in the history of her past adventures.

When Selvaggia, from the prow of Don Ugo di Moncada's galley, where she fought to defend Lambert, was hurled headlong into the sea, wounded and exhausted, (the reader will doubtless have recognised her in the soldier wearing the morion,) after the first chilling sensation, produced by the water, she recollected nothing more; she became quite insensible; and when she returned to herself, she was lying in a dark place, close and fœtid, stretched upon straw, amid heaps of wounded and dying. Her first impression was, that she had passed out of this life, and was surrounded by the pains and miseries of the lower world; but gradually recovering her senses, and hearing the heavy and confused sound of steps overhead on the deck, and the noise caused by the exact and prolonged motion of the oars, she discovered that she was in the hold of a galley. Her memory then recalled the late battle, and forgetting her own condition, her pain and wounds, her thoughts at once recurred to Lambert, and she exclaimed with a sigh :

" Oh ! I'm sure he's killed ! "

The iron stoicism of this woman could not bear up against such an idea ; and, poor creature ! she began to cry like a child. After weeping for some time, she said within herself, in a moment of terrible desperation :

" How pitiless—how wily—must the demon be, that has dogged my steps ever since I came into the world !—that still pursues me everywhere—in peace—in war—even in the depths of the sea. —There seems no escape from him !—Well, but I wanted to die a while ago—was it then so great a thing I asked for ? To die !—eh ! but for Lambert, to save his life.—Oh, yes !—that's just it ; even this was too great a happiness for Selvaggia ! Happiness !—that is what she is never to know—never—never !—But who am I ? What am I ? " she exclaimed, at last, giving way to a loud and inconsolable burst of grief ; " Who—what am I ? —Am I a viper ? a wild beast ?—What did I do, before I was born ? what sin did I commit ?—did I ask thee, to bring me into this world, thou great and terrible God, who calledst me into being ? "—

These terrific ravings, which did but aggravate her malady, caused Selvaggia to relapse into her former stupor; she continued unconscious for some time. On recovering her senses, she found a Capuchin friar kneeling by her side, and bathing her temples with vinegar. She strove in vain for some time to speak; but as soon as she succeeded in making herself understood,—she asked:

"Where are we?"

To which the good friar replied: "On board the Santa Maria, my son, in the waters of Monte Christo, and we are making direct for Gaeta."

"Oh! tell me," she replied eagerly, making an effort to raise her head; "the Spanish flag-ship—on which they were fighting, when I fell into the sea?—"

"Gone to the bottom, my son; and may God's peace be with all those poor souls."

"And he too?—Lambert too?—that noble youth?—he that killed all those with his single hand—Oh! tell me—is he too gone?"

"How should I know, my son? I know not of whom you would speak; there have been so many killed! To know the names of all, is impossible! All I can tell you is, that the galley lay on her broadside, for the shot had disabled her, and she was sinking—and in a moment, the Spanish flag, which floated at the top of the mainmast, disappeared in the sea."

"Oh! he is killed then!" she kept repeating in a deep, but feeble voice; after which she remained quite still and motionless, without appearing to be conscious of the consolations and kind attentions of the friar.

The vessel having arrived at Gaeta, at that time held by the French, the wounded were put ashore; and amongst them, Selvaggia; where they were crowded together in some dirty and unhealthy warehouses, in the vicinity of the harbour. If the reader has ever seen (and if he has not, so much the better for him) a military hospital in time of war; if his foot has ever trodden on the matted and fœtid straw, which serves for a bed to hundreds of the wounded, amidst filth and wretchedness, he can form some idea of the horrible place, into which this poor creature was brought; and let him remember, that three hundred years ago, such hospitals were in a much worse condition than they are now.

It would seem as if nature, intending to produce certain classes, predestined to suffer, had been careful (with more cruelty, than forethought) to fortify them with a constitution, proof against every hardship; just as a shipwright covers the sides of a ship with copper, which is destined to encounter the storms and icebergs of the polar regions.

Such a constitution Selvaggia possessed; and the pains and hardships, the misery and want she had been exposed to, for more than a year, had not sufficed to put an end to her existence. After a few months, ere her wounds were well healed, she was carried (for walk she could not) from the straw of the hospital, to make room for other sufferers, and left on the pavement in the street, where she must have perished with hunger, had she not been taken in, and relieved by some charitable persons; until, after some time, and with great care, she recovered her health and strength.

So long as she had considered it certain she could not survive, the thought of quitting life without seeing Lambert once more, and without hearing any tidings of him, aggravated her disorder; but no sooner did she feel her strength reviving, and the sensation of life revisit her heart, than her hopes began to rise, that perhaps after all he had not been killed, and that she might yet meet with him again. And this hope proved, in her case, the best medicine. She had sought indeed to obtain information respecting him from the soldiers, or travellers, who passed through Gaeta; but she had never succeeded in gaining any tidings to relieve her suspense, or give her the least intimation of his fate; and whenever she met with a stranger, and after questioning him, found her hopes once more come to nothing, the poor girl would repeat with a sigh her usual exclamation: "Oh! I am sure they have killed him!"

At last, feeling herself tolerably strong, she, one morning, took her leave of those who had so kindly sheltered her; and alone, and on foot, with a stick, and nothing in the world, but the few clothes on her back, and a small sum, given to her by her benefactors, she boldly took the road to Rome, through the narrow passes of Itri. She had heard, that Florence was at that time besieged. "If he's alive, he will be there, I'm sure," she said; "and if he is not there,—I shall then know, that I may take leave of life—but at any rate, I shall die in the place where he was born, on the step of his door.—This consolation, at least, they will not deny me?—O God, grant that no one, at that moment may pass, who might recognise me and say—This is Selvaggia, the strumpet—for perhaps I might be driven away even from there—"

With such thoughts, and continually making fresh suppositions and fluctuating between hope and fear, she walked along thoughtful and alone. The two first days she got over a good many miles; but then her wounds began once more to be uneasy, and she was obliged to rest longer and more frequently. She passed Terracina, the marshes and the hills of Velletri and Albano; at one time drenched with the autumnal rains, which beat pitilessly upon her; at another, exhausted with weariness; and then again, agonized with the acute pains that shot through all her limbs: but ever sustained by the hope, and borne along by her eager desire, of seeing Florence; where she expected to put an end to her long and distressing suspense. After ten days' journey, she entered Rome one evening, by St. John's gate. She remained here some days to recruit her strength, and then set forward once more; and through Viterbo, Radicofani, and Sienna, a month after her leaving Gaeta, she arrived at last at the gates of Florence.

Entering the porte San Gallo (she had been obliged to quit the direct road, and to gain this point by a long circuit, so as to avoid the Imperialist camp) she sat down beneath the arch of the gate, not so much to rest, for her robust constitution had been rather invigorated, than otherwise, by the fatigues of her journey, as to think, what plan she should adopt to find Lambert out; for in such a large city, where she had never been before in her life, full of soldiers and other people, she knew it was no easy thing.—He is a soldier, she said; so then, if I ask for the commander of the troops, of course I can find him. Having then entered into conversation with some of the custom-house officers, she learnt that the captain of the Florentines was Signor Malatesta Baglioni, lord of Perugia. She started at this name; and with good reason, as we shall see presently. She remained for a while in deep thought; at last she said to herself: "Then my father will be with him!—My father here?—and I may see him in a few minutes!" She stood still some time longer, while this internal conflict continued: then, all at once starting up, as if she had taken her resolution, she exclaimed: "Perhaps it will be the best thing for me to do.—I'll go." And asking her way, first of one, and then of another, she reached the Serristori palace by nightfall.

Master Barlaam, in the meantime, was alone in his study; which we might more properly call his laboratory, as it was the place, where, by the aid of a couple of stoves, and a vast quantity of pipkins, alembics and retorts, he concocted the medicines, and distilled the waters which sustained, or were intended to sustain, the flagging health of his patron. The lean and miserable frame of the aged Hebrew, was enveloped in the classic dressing-gown of faded velvet, lined with fur; without which, thanks to the painters and romancers who have preceded us, it is impossible to frame to ourselves the idea of an alchymist.

He had all the vices peculiar to races that have been long persecuted; and at the same time, those qualities, I could almost say, virtues, which nature kindly grants them, so that they may not be left entirely defenceless against their persecutors. He was avaricious and subtle; incapable of indulging, at any time, or for anybody, the least feeling of pity or tenderness; with no care but for himself; and no other object, but his own interest. But this very concentration of all his faculties within the narrow circle of his own individual self, had communicated to him a wonderful rapidity of conception in framing his designs, unswerving tenacity in the execution of them, and a calculating sagacity, which rendered him crafty and patient in turning and guiding to his ends, all with whom he had to do. His cold, but at the same time, clear mind, might be compared to a chess-board, on which the moves are made at long intervals, and well weighed; the result of a fixed, impenetrable design.

In an age when the pleasures, the conveniences, and even the security of life, were the result, for the most part, of birth, of bravery, and of physical force, he, without any of these advantages, the descendant, too, of a despised and hated race, had succeeded, by his abilities and his cunning, to acquire those advantages, which were denied to him by other means, owing to the social condition of the age. He had got into the service of Malatesta; and, under the shadow of his protection, he lived in a degraded condition, it is true; but he was rich and safe. A momentary ebullition, a whim of his master, might, however, deprive him of everything, and of life into the bargain; for the Jew was well aware that he was not loved, and that those acts of kindness and regard which were shown towards him, were only because he believed he could not do without him. He knew that Malatesta was prone to suspicion, terrible in his anger, and, above all, implacable in his revenge; and the constant study of his life was, to keep unbroken and entire the meshes of the net, in which he held him entangled; to take care not to let him be conscious of his thraldom; and that he should regard him as a faithful and affectionate servant, incapable of treachery or dissimulation.

He was sitting at the table, reading a manuscript copy of Averroes by the light of a small lamp, when the curtain was drawn aside, that hung before the door which led out into the court-yard, and a soldier entering, said: "Master Barlaam, there is a young man outside, who craves permission to speak with you."

Before the old man had time to reply, Selvaggia entered, but remained standing in the door-way; while the soldier went about his business.

"Who are you?" said Barlaam, contracting his eyebrows, and placing his thin and withered hand between his eyes and the light, in order the better to see who it was, that entered so unceremoniously.

Selvaggia paused a moment before replying. She felt an indescribable sensation at the sight of the man, who had been the original and guilty author of all her misery and misfortunes. Moving towards him with slow and deliberate step, and resting her hands on the table, she stood in his full view for a moment, and then with a bitter smile she said: "I am changed—eh—since you sold me!—with this poor altered face, I should now be but sorry merchandise———."

The old man at once recognised her; and without giving the least indication, either by the tone of his voice, or the expression of his countenance, or even by the slightest movement, of the impression produced on him by this unexpected visit, he said, with imperturbable calmness: "Ah!—is it you, Selvaggia?"

Stung by the coldness of this unfeeling reception, she raised her head, folded her arms, and replied in a firm and resolute tone: "Yes, it is I. And now listen to me, Master Barlaam.—During all the days and hours that have passed, these many years, since the moment when you left me alone, on that night—in that room with him—has the thought never recurred to your mind:—God gave me a daughter!—what have I done with her?—Have you never been disturbed in your sleep by her image?—Have you not seen her scorned, outraged, insulted, and loaded with infamy, a wanderer and an outcast? Has the thought never crossed your mind,——perhaps she is naked—perhaps she is hungry—perhaps she lies sick and ill, and has no one to give her so much as a drop of water? no one to aid or succour her?——Tell me, have you never felt a moment's remorse, when you thought on the unmerited wrongs and sufferings she was exposed to, and all owing to you?"—

Selvaggia paused a moment, awaiting a reply; but seeing that her father continued unmoved, and apathetic, with his eyes bent on his manuscript, and that he gave no sign of any intention to speak, she went on, her passionate tone every moment rising higher—

"And this misery, these sufferings that I have enumerated, think you they have been the only ones, or the worst? Did the idea never present itself to your imagination, that this unhappy being, whom you condemned to guilt and shame, had, perhaps, received from nature, a soul that scorned everything mean and base, and a heart capable of virtue and of love? That this love might, one day, be as much a want, a necessity, as the air we breathe? That it might become her constant thought, her very life, her only and most ardent desire? And that she might, by your fault, have been rendered unfit, unworthy to obtain it, and might die the victim of desperation, and heaping curses on your head? Tell me, I say, has this thought never occurred to you?—Move—answer me—in God's name!" she shouted, almost maddened, and striking with her clenched fists on the table.

"I verily believe you have the devil within you!" replied her father, pushing his chair back a little, half afraid she was going to do him some mischief. However, assuming an air of easy confidence, he continued: "But just tell me, Selvaggia; whom did you suppose yourself to be? some prince's daughter? Are you not aware, that you were born in a land of Christians, of a Jewish mendicant? That the rich and the noble set a higher value on their hounds, than on the children of our race? That this degradation you speak of, you could not have escaped, and that you were doomed to it, from your mother's womb? And in order that you might, at least, live in ease and comfort, I gave you to one, who had the means to render you rich and happy; and if you have not known how to steer your course, if you have got yourself cast off, how am I to blame? and why are you come to disturb me with these fancies and follies of yours?"

"And who told you, that I wanted to live in ease and comfort? Who asked you for riches? Is there no other good in this world, but gold?"

"Come, Selvaggia, if you go on to play the crazy wench in this fashion, I have but to whistle, and three or four soldiers will answer my summons, and turn you out into the street; for if I say I don't know who you are, I shall have said all that is necessary. But if you will only listen to reason —if you want money—" and the slow and hesitating tone, in which he pronounced these last words, plainly showed how much they cost the avaricious old man.

"I did not come here for money," she almost roared out, manifesting both in her tone and gestures, a still higher pitch of excitement, "I came here, because I have a hell in my heart— because I cannot live without him,—because I want to see him again at all hazards—because I hope yet, before I die, to find a heart, that is not hard as iron towards me!—Love!—oh—I know it well, is not for the miserable Selvaggia!—But a touch of affection—ah! I shall obtain that at least, if I can but find Lambert once more."

"Oh, in fact," said Barlaam sharply, extending his hand towards a small brazen whistle that lay on the table, "I don't understand you!"

Selvaggia arrested his outstretched hand, and changing, all at once, the almost ferocious expression of her countenance, said with a cold and sinister irony: "You don't understand me?—Wait a moment; I'll speak to you in a language you will understand.—If your memory serves you—(and if it does not, you must make it, for it concerns you!) you will remember, that before you sold me to the man, into whose possession I at last came, there in the castle of Friuli—you had promised me to Malatesta—at that time a soldier in the Venetian service.—He was then but commencing his career, and not over rich; and the price he could give you, was less than that offered you by the other—therefore, to that other you consigned me, giving Malatesta to understand that I had been carried off by some soldiers. You never imagined,—eh? that I knew all this?—you will perhaps say that I have no proofs to convince him of your deception; but herein lies your mistake. You were not wary enough, Master Barlaam! In your haste, and for fear your advantageous bargain should slip through your fingers, you wrote a letter to the man who bought me; telling him the state of affairs, and imploring him to keep me concealed till such time as Malatesta, with his troops, had left those parts; and so it came to pass. Malatesta neither knew nor suspected anything of the real truth; but having risen in course of time to a more splendid rank, he admitted you into his household, and made you the rich man you are. This letter, as I lived free and uncontrolled in the man's house, I one day found, and it seemed to me worth preserving; but I never dreamt that a time would come, when it would prove of so much consequence.—I have it with me; and that you may not fancy I am dealing in vain boasting, see here whether it is true."

So saying, she drew from her bosom a letter, and unfolded it before the old man, who was quite overcome by the sight of it. He well knew Malatesta was not the man to forgive such a trick, if it came to his knowledge.

"Master Barlaam!" said Selvaggia, letting go the hand, which she had held tightly grasped in her own during this address, "now call your soldiers, and have me turned out; I will no longer prevent you.—Oh! you have changed your mind, have you?—You understand me now, do you—eh?"

CHAPTER IX.

The wily old man, finding himself caught in his own trap, did not lose his presence of mind; and where force seemed of little avail, he thought perhaps dissimulation might serve his turn. He tried to clothe his grim, unsightly features with an air of lowly and remorseful tenderness, but he only rendered them doubly repulsive. He looked at Selvaggia, and shaking his head, said to her: "Yes, I do understand you!—Go then; go to Malatesta; show him that letter—bid him cut off the small remnant of my days. That is what you are come for; you want to get possession of the little property, that I have been able to amass with so many years of toil—it is my death that you thirst for—well, I deserve it!—my offence was unpardonable; I had desired to rescue you from rags and poverty—to render you rich and happy, to put you in a condition of wealth and spendour—oh! to be sure, I deserve death. Ah, my child!" he exclaimed, rising up, and extending his arms towards Selvaggia, "is this then the fate, that you are preparing for your unhappy father?"

"You, my father?" replied Selvaggia, drawing back and smiling with bitter scorn. "Just now, you professed not to understand me; now, I don't understand you."

"Don't understand me?—Wretched girl,—does not the voice of kindred, and of blood fall upon your ear?"

"There is a voice of blood between us; but it belongs to you, not to me, to listen to it. That voice will tell you, that by means of this letter, your blood is mine—*is mine*, do you understand me?—that of Master Barlaam, not of my father; for I alone, among living beings, never had one.—But make yourself easy, I am not come to shed it, I do not want to work your ruin; keep your riches to yourself; at the price you have gained them, they are yours indeed.—Sit you down again, and listen to me.—I met two years ago a young man, an angel, the only being on earth I care for, the only one who makes life endurable, so long as the hope of meeting him again continues—a man—But why speak to you about him?" she said, with an air of impatience; feeling, while she spoke to Barlaam of Lambert, a similar repugnance, to what Lambert himself had shown on a former occasion, when hearing his love alluded to by her. "In one word," she added, "I came to Florence to seek for him. I want nothing of you, but that you would help me in tracing him; and as soon as I have found him, I shall leave you—and you will never hear any further tidings of me. These are my conditions, Master!—"

On hearing these words, the old man breathed freely once more; he thought that this was getting off very easily. Finding that his fictitious tenderness was quite useless, he resumed his hard and stony aspect, and said—

"I will help you to the utmost of my power, very willingly; if that's all you want. Just tell me his name—who is he?"

Selvaggia, in the fewest possible words, informed her father of the name, the personal appearance and rank of Lambert; and he, taking a note of it, wrote it on a piece of paper. He then gave his daughter a few silver coins, and upon taking leave, told her to come again the next day; and by that time he would see what could be done.

On the morrow she came twice during the day, and a third time late in the evening; but Barlaam had not yet succeeded in discovering anything. "The city is full of soldiers; the matter requires time; I have sent inquiries to all the officers, commanding the troops; if he is in the city, he will be found; but we cannot work miracles;" he said this to his daughter to soothe her impatience.

Troilus and Sir Benedetto, whom we left wending their way through the streets, had in the meantime reached Malatesta's palace. As they found they could not be admitted to see Malatesta, because at that hour he saw no one, Benedetto said—

"Let us go to Master Barlaam—it is so trifling a matter, that it will be all one. If he says a single word to Malatesta, the thing will be done."

Whereupon he proceeded to Barlaam's chamber, with whom he was on very familiar terms. Having first doffed their monastic cloaks, and thrown them into a corner, they entered, and found the old man with Selvaggia; whom, from her being dressed like a soldier, they did not discover to be a woman, but supposed that she was one of the household.

"Good even, Master," said Benedetto, with a certain air of authority in his manner; and the Hebrew replied to his salutation with profound humility, as was his custom with everybody; but especially with those whom he knew to stand high with his master.

"We are come to ask you a favour," said Benedetto. "This gentleman—he is the person who once came, you know, disguised as a monk—one of our friends in the camp—you remember." The old man gave a nod of assent. "Well, then, he wants, and I too, to speak to Malatesta about a matter of business—but we are told, that at this hour, he admits no visitors. Would you, therefore, do us the kindness to go up to him and explain our wishes; and say, that I and this young man earnestly entreat he will—it's a mere trifle, since it will be quite sufficient for him merely to assent. We want to send along with the rural guards, a soldier who is attached to the troop of Amico d'Arsoli; the reason of this request, I'll speak more to him about, when we meet."

"And what is this soldier's name?" said Barlaam, on the point of moving, and showing by the expression of his countenance, that the matter was easy enough.

"It's that fellow that has lived in Niccolo de Lapi's house all his life; who was some time in the Black Bands with Signor John; and now is on the point of marrying Laodamia—the *Maid of Florence*, as they call her—that is, if he has time to do so (and he cast a sly glance at Troilus, and smiled), that young Lambert, you know—"

"Ah!" replied Barlaam, "I know." And he went out.

As Troilus and Benedetto directed their attention entirely to Barlaam, they did not observe the expression of surprise and joy, elicited from Selvaggia, on hearing the name of the man, whom she had been so long in search of. But her first emotion over, the words that dwelt most on her mind were—"who is on the point of marrying Laodamia." These were to her like so many arrows, piercing her heart; and there passed before her eyes, with the rapidity of lightning, as it were a vision of new and more terrible miseries, which were in store for her. Being left alone, then, with the two strangers, eager to hear and speak again of Lambert, though well aware that every word would add a fresh pang to her heart, she began by saying, with all the self-control and indifference she could command: "I, too, was once in the Black Bands under Signor John—I know that smart youth well, and am glad to hear he is in Florence.— But tell me, my masters, how say you, —he is going to take a wife ?"

" Yes, he is on the point of doing so—that is—not immediately, I fancy," replied Troilus, with a malicious smile.

Selvaggia perceived there was some mystery lurking beneath; and so became more and more intent on penetrating it. But how to accomplish her object, was the question. Could she hope that these men would so far confide in a stranger, as to reveal their secret all at once? However, she went on sounding them, with such address, that she elicited the whole story of Lambert's engagement with Lisa, and afterwards with her sister; and in fine, she learnt all about the expected marriage. But whence then came the hitch, as to its being accomplished? Who was desirous of hindering it, and why? All this was still a mystery to her, and she knew no means whereby to clear it up.

Presently, Barlaam returned with a smiling face, and said: " I have found my lord in good humour, and in a cheerful mood—your business is all right. Everything will be done as you wish. Poor man, when his pains leave him at peace, he is quite another person.—Oh! he is indeed a worthy man, and may God grant him health and long life.—He has bid me, too, to send you upstairs to him;—this way, and he will be very glad to see you. So, if you please—here you are—this way—"

So saying, he raised the curtain before the low door, by which he had re-entered the room, and directed them the way upstairs; then, returning to his seat, he said to Selvaggia: " The man is found—eh ?"

" He is found," she replied; and approaching her father, and taking him by the arm, she said hastily, and with a kind of repressed excitement: " Now I must know, when this marriage is to take place ; and wherefore, and by whom the attempt is made to hinder it :—do you inquire this of them ; I will remain out of sight, in the adjoining room."

" And how the devil am I to make them tell me, if they don't choose ?"

" I will—I must know ! I tell you," shouted Selvaggia; and darting on him a glance, which told him the rest, she retired into the room close by.

Barlaam bit his lips with vexation, at finding himself thus swayed by a girl ; who, he soon found, was not to be jested with. But if he ran a considerable risk in refusing to satisfy her, it was perhaps equally dangerous to disclose to her the name, rank, and schemes of the two strangers. Their secret negotiations with Malatesta on behalf of the Palleschan party, their nightly and mysterious visits, were an important secret, to be jealously guarded under a suspicious and wary government. How think of entrusting it to Selvaggia ; who, in his opinion, was half mad, and who would not fail to disclose it to Lambert, one of the bitterest adversaries of the Palleschi ? And if through her, these matters should come to light, was it not more than probable, that Troilus and Benedetto would accuse the stranger of that evening of it, and through him, Master Barlaam ? And what Malatesta was likely to do in that case, Barlaam pretty well knew.

But luckily for him, he had not his equal in devising expedients in cases of emergency. He went to the door of the room, into which Selvaggia had retired, and said: "Harkee; if I wait for them to return, may be they will be gone out another way; besides, even if they come down here again, it is not likely, they would disclose their affairs to me.—I desire, indeed I do, to gratify you, my daughter; as I am not the cruel man you take me for; I will therefore go up to Malatesta's door, and will be sure to overhear all they say to him."

"As you will, only let me know," replied Selvaggia. And the crafty old villain ascended the stairs, grinning and chuckling over his trick.

Having reached a dark passage, through which they would have to make their way, on coming out of Malatesta's room, he took his stand, to wait for them, without caring to listen to their conversation, as he was utterly unconcerned on that point, and was all the time occupied in concocting a tale to tell Selvaggia. In a short time, they came out; and he, letting them know he was there in the dark, and taking them by the hand, led them, by a different direction, to the principal staircase, saying: "For safety's sake, it is better not to be seen again by that soldier in my room; he belongs to the house, and is a trusty man, but he is a giddy youth;—besides the fewer the persons that see you, the better."

This precaution seemed to them both natural and reasonable; and, without further thought, they bid him adieu and went their way.

Having returned down-stairs and called Selvaggia from her hiding-place, he said to her, in an open and easy manner: "I know all about it now, and can satisfy you fully. It's lucky, however, that I went up-stairs! for these men would go out a different way!——Oh! there's not the great mystery attending this matter we fancied. These men are two gentlemen of Florence; the elder, Gabriel Spini; and the younger, is his son, that I hardly remembered to have seen before; his name is Louis. This young fellow is in love with the damsel, that Lambert is going to marry; and finding no other means of breaking off, or at least suspending, the match, he has devised the plan of inducing Malatesta to send him on service out of Florence; as he will in fact do to-morrow; for a hundred horsemen are just now under orders, to set out for Empoli, as a reinforcement to the commissary Ferruccio."

In Selvaggia's heart a fierce conflict arose at these words. To suffer her beloved Lambert to be thus betrayed; to let him undergo the terrible anguish (and, poor creature, she knew something of it by experience) that was impending over him, seemed to her little less than a wrong on her part, a deception practised on one, for whom she would gladly have endured a thousand pangs; and she could not reconcile herself to it. On the other hand, to resign him up, by her own act, into the arms of her fortunate rival; to picture him to herself by the side of another, a happy husband, immersed in all the joys and transports of love, and herself never more to have a thought of his bestowed on her, to find herself once more forsaken by all, in her former desolation and solitude,—the thought was more than she could bear; it was too terrible. Selvaggia, distracted at the thought, could not endure such an idea; she was obliged to dismiss that, at all hazards; and in order to excuse herself in her own eyes, and to reconcile her conflicting feelings, she said within herself: "I shall be able to reveal all to Lambert, to tell him that he may punish my offence, that he may kill me, if he will; but let me see him first—yes, only let me see him, and speak to him once more!"

Agitated by these thoughts, she remained mute, and, as it were, in a reverie for some minutes; at last, having firmly resolved on her course, she started up, all on a sudden, and said in a sharp tone: "Now, Master, there are two things more you must do for me, and then I leave you. One is, that no one but me may be sent to-morrow, to convey to Lambert the order for his departure; the other, that you would provide me with a suit of armour, and a horse to follow him."

"A suit of armour!" exclaimed Barlaam in astonishment; "are you indeed out of your senses? Think you, you could support the weight, and have free use of your limbs, with a suit of armour on?"

"Whether I can or no, you shall see for yourself; for the present, leave that to me."

"But where am I to find such things?" he asked, disturbed by the thought of the expense; "you must know, that in a siege, whoever has horses and armour, keeps them for himself."

"Master Barlaam, I might reply merely, that I want them, and must have them; but I would have you consider, that it is in my power to deprive you of something more, than the mere price of a horse and accoutrements.—Just bear in mind, too, that I must have a helmet, with a vizor to let down; and now, farewell till to-morrow."

Selvaggia went out; and Barlaam, angry and displeased, was under the necessity of thinking how to rid himself of his daughter, and comply with her wishes. On the morrow, almost before daylight, he set out, and by dint of several scores of crowns—cursing the person who inflicted on him the necessity of parting with them—he succeeded in getting by the evening, what his daughter had demanded.

He received from Malatesta the written order for Lambert to join the troops, which were ordered to Empoli; and easily obtained leave, by various pretexts, from one of the officers in command to assign the duty of summoning Lambert, to a man known to himself, and of conducting him to the place appointed for the muster, and also permission for him to accompany the troops out of Florence.

This same day was, for the inmates of Niccolo's house, especially the females, full of busy thoughts and preparations. Laodamia awaking at dawn, with a heart cheerful and serene, hastened to dress herself, and covering her head with a veil, which reached to her knees, she went to the neighbouring church to offer her devotions. Having returned home, and presented herself to her father, who, that morning, was more than usually tender in his caresses, she went up into her room; which, on the present occasion, might rather be called her wardrobe, and, by the aid of Mistress Fede and her sister, proceeded to get her clothes in order, and to prepare such things as were necessary, with that bustling eagerness and trepidation, which are the effect of great mental agitation. Lisa, become herself once more, after her first momentary outburst of wounded pride, and probably more than ever afraid, for her own sake, of showing the least symptom of it again, gave her advice and assistance in these arrangements without that torrent of words, which the fairer portion of the human race are wont to lavish on such operations, when the mind is not absorbed by more pressing and important thoughts.

Mona Fede was the only one who kept up the dialogue, or rather it might be called the monologue, and shuffling about the room, counting and arranging the clothes, with which the bed, the table, and every article of furniture in the chamber, was covered, she went on to say: " Well, I'm sure, to think that 'ere a young lady of the house of the Lapi should be about to wed, without there being time allowed us, to furnish her with a bit of a wardrobe! It's lucky, that there is still left some tolerable things of my lady, your mother Flora!—For when the Friar began to preach, she took to wearing dark dresses, and would never after that wear any other."

Then, drawing forth, not without some difficulty, a large chest, partly carved, and partly painted in the style of the fourteenth century, that lay in a corner, similar to the one we described in Niccolo's room (both had formerly contained the wardrobe of Mistress Flora) she dragged it to the side of a table, on which she had piled, on one side, a heap of clothes. Having dusted it very carefully all over, she opened it, and turning to Laodamia, said: " Now, if you will have the goodness to write them down, we will make a list of all I put in."

Laodamia got ready her materials, and leaning down to the table, with her pen in her hand, proceeded to write to Fede's dictation :—

" One pelisse and cloak of crimson damask with fringes.

" One gown of Alexandrine damask with flowered sleeves.

"One violet coloured embroidered pelisse.

"One embroidered dress of white silk, with sleeves of crimson silk.——This I remember she put on once, and only once, and it was to witness the entry of Charles VIII., a very little man he was, fair and delicate, he looked quite a boy; and he thought to take Florence down at a single gulp! Yes—yes! Peter Capponi, God bless him! showed him the shortest way out.—And then what times were those!—what frolics!——

"One dress of white serge, with sleeves of green damask.

"One cloak of white cloth.

"Twelve chemises: twelve head-dresses: twenty-five pocket-handkerchiefs. Twenty-five &c. &c.

"One crape cap ornamented with pearls and silver."

"This," said Laodamia, "put back in its place; as these are not fitting times, nor am I in a position to wear such things."

"As you will," replied Fede, putting the cap on one side; then adding with a sigh: "Poor young lady, it falls to your lot to become a bride in an evil hour!—no festivities!—Oh! this horrid siege (I can't bear the word)—when will it end? and all these miseries with it!——

"One cap of white damask.—I am given to understand that our master will have no nuptial feast; no invitations, no music, no anything. As it's him, his humour will be complied with; as people obey him more readily than the Gonfalonier himself.

"One small cloak of white cloth.—Eh! matters were managed in another fashion, when your father married my Lady Flora. At that time, the Friar Savonarola had not forbidden banquettings and revels at weddings.—He was a holy man, 'tis true—but yet he had a rare quantity of goodly finery burnt. Sir Niccolo had a portrait of my lady, done by the hand of Francia—quite a jewel! it seemed to breathe; this too he insisted on being committed to the flames, along with other valuable paintings, at the command of Father Savonarola."

"Ah! well, let us thank God for what we have got," replied Laodamia.

"Why truly, I know, my dear young lady, your mind is not set on finery and gewgaws! You care little about such things;—and you are right! You are going to be the bride of the bonniest youth in all Florence; and that's enough for you. God and the Holy Virgin will bless you, and you will be happy, as you deserve to be. Oh! yes, my heart tells me, you will have no more troubles; and I have always found that my presentiments never deceive me."

"God grant it, Fede!" replied Laodamia; and in the midst of such occupations, that day passed; which was spent also by Lambert in arranging his matters, in procuring the necessary documents for the contract, and visiting the spot where his mother was buried; to whom, on entering into his new state of life, he wished to consecrate his first thoughts.

In the evening, the family assembled in Niccolo's apartment; and before long, the friends, who had been invited, arrived, and Tommaso Grossi, the notary; upon which they all proceeded on foot, Niccolo with the bride and bridegroom going first, and the others following behind, to the church of St. Mark.

In the middle of the nave was placed a table, with a cloth on it, and around it seats; a few candles illuminated the church; on entering which, Niccolo and his company were received by Father Benedict and Father Zaccaria; there was also a crowd of silk-weavers, and of soldiers, who knew Lambert; and a great many of the lower orders, who, ranging themselves on both sides, formed a circle round the table, at which the contract was to be signed.

The crowd were kept in awe by the presence of Niccolo, and only now and then a few words were heard, whispered in an under tone, and addressed by the bystanders to the ear of those next them, full of praises and expressions of admiration at the beauty, and the mild and majestic aspect of the bride, who, at that moment, seemed formed to attract all eyes and win all hearts.

Dressed in white, with a long veil fastened on her forehead by a wreath of orange flowers, as she passed along through so many eager eyes, as she took her seat, at the place Father Benedict directed her to, and in all her movements, she displayed a certain majesty, unmixed with pride, a timidity without awkwardness, and a sense of joy, that was tempered by such angelic thoughts, that all the bystanders, as they gazed on her, felt subdued almost to adoration.

Niccolo sat in the middle of the table, with his back to the door. On his right the bride; next to her, Lisa and Troilus with her brothers; on the left, Lambert and his friends, who were to be the witnesses; and amongst the rest, Fanfulla; on one side were the two priests and the notary; which latter rising up, began to read the marriage contract, in the following words:—

Anno 1529, *die* 23 *Novemb.; Lambertus quondam Petri de populo S. Johannis de Florentia, recepit a D. Laodamia filia Nicolai, quondam Cionis, de eodem populo S. Johannis de Florentia, sponsa dicti Lamberti, nomine dotis, libras* 1010 *Florent. parv., scilicet libras* 863 *in uno Podere cum domibus et habituro in populo d. Gavinana. Et libras* 88 *et solidos* 10 *in uno casolari posito in populo S. Laurentii de Florent.* 1. *d. Croce di via. Et libras* 59 *in pecunia et aliis rebus mobilibus etc.; ideoque propter nuptias; et vice Morgincap, secundum usum civit. Florentiæ, prædictus Lambertus fecit prædictæ D. Laodamiæ donationem de ipsius bonis libras* 30 *Flor. parv. Actum Florentiæ, testibus, &c.*

Postea incontinenti, coram dictis testibus, Lambertus et D. Laodamia, per mutuum consensum *inter se intervenientem et annuli dationem et receptionem matrimonium ad invicem contraxerunt. Ego Thomas Grossi, quondam Francisci, de pago Bellanensi, Imperiali auct. Judex atque Notarius publicus rogatus scripsi.*

Lambert who had had no share in the drawing-up of this document, and did not even know its contents, sensibly felt the delicate kindness of Niccolo, in giving him, under the name of dowry, the small house in which his mother had passed the last years of her life. He cast a grateful look towards the old man, and one still more tender towards Laodamia. In the meantime the notary, taking in his hand a salver, on which were two rings, came and presented it to the betrothed, in order that they might make a mutual exchange of them.

In the surrounding crowd, there were seen, as we have said, several soldiers, the greater part without arms, or only with their corslet or coat-of-mail on, just as when not about to go forth to battle. Among them, in the foremost row, and only a few paces removed from the bride, there had been observed by several persons, from the very commencement of the ceremony, one who, from being cased in steel from head to foot, and wearing his vizor down, and also owing to his motionless posture, and a certain strange attitude, attracted, from time to time, the curious gaze of every person, who had but once noticed him.

"He fancies he's on the battlements, and not in a church," said one. "I fancy he's cold, or has the ague, he trembles so!" said another.

When the notary had presented the rings to the betrothed, and they had made a mutual exchange of them, they and the whole company turned their head in the direction of a slight noise, that arose round about the armed stranger. Those who stood near him had heard a sort of indistinct suppressed moan, resound in the hollow of his helmet; he seemed to reel about once or twice, as if he had lost his balance, so that some one, fearing he would fall, had held him up by his arms. Somebody close by said, loud enough to be heard: "He's drunk—eh?" And many began to titter. Thereupon another rejoined: "It's certainly a great-shame to come into a church so lightly clad!" And in like manner every one had his jest. Upon this the soldier, casting round a haughty glance, which seemed to flash through the eyelet-holes of his vizor, forced his way through the crowd, with the not very gentle contact of his iron elbows; and amidst the murmurs of those, whom he left grumbling behind, he made his way out of the church. Matters soon became quiet again, and no one thought any more of him.

The ceremony ended, the priests directed all to retire, except those of the family of Lapi, or their friends. Whilst they were waiting for this knot of people to disperse, Niccolo said to Father Benedict, with a sigh, but with a calm countenance: "God has chastened me sorely in this church, on this very spot! But now His mercy permits me to experience the greatest consolation that could fall to my lot, before I die! Blessed and praised be His holy name!———Listen, my son Lambert: in giving you this day my dear Laodamia, I hope and believe that I have given you the best gift I had to bestow. If such be the case, then do I fulfil a great duty, and keep the promise I made to your father on the very stones we now stand upon, when bespattered with his blood (now many years ago) that he shed to save me. Come hither and look; do you see the white stone of this grave? It was red with your father's blood on that terrible night, when we sustained the attack of our adversaries, endeavouring to defend the glorious friar Jerome, and hoping to save him. But God, for our sins, had otherwise ordained. Here I, alone and surrounded by the enemy, must have fallen, but your father sacrificed his life to save mine. May his noble spirit look down from heaven, and see me embrace you, and by receiving you as my son, fulfil the promise I made him. And may the love you have sworn to each other, continue pure and happy, and outlast every other feeling and affection; yielding only to the sublime and holy love which you owe to your country, and to liberty."

"God grant that both may flourish," said Laodamia in a low voice; and added in her heart: "and my Lambert with them!"

Niccolo thought it was now time to retire; and having saluted the priests, and thanked them, he said to Father Benedict, that in two days they would return, and present themselves for the nuptial benediction; and so, in the same order in which they came, they all together returned home.

Mistress Fede in the meantime disregarding, in some measure, Niccolo's orders, had busied herself in adorning, as well as she could, the rooms on the ground-floor; and in the one which led to the bedroom, she had laid out the supper in excellent style, with an abundance of flowers and lights; in which she was assisted by Lambert's servant, Maurice. Whilst the party were at St. Mark's, and she was attending to these preparations, all bustle and anxiety, lest they should return before she had completed her arrangements, a ring was heard at the gate. "Here they are, I do declare!" she exclaimed in a grumbling tone, "and I have no one to help me but this tortoise!" And leaving to Maurice the task of wiping some dishes, that she was at the moment occupied with, she ran to open the door. In less than half-a-minute, however, she came back; and snatching from his hand the cloth, which he was using in a way that she thought very awkward, she said: "One can't have a minute's peace with those soldiers!—It was some army man, with his vizor down, just as if he was going to a tourney, and wanted Lambert. To be sure, thought I, catch him attending to this fellow just now!——So I told him he is at St. Mark's, and shut the door in his face———."

And without thinking any more of the matter, she kept running backwards and forwards about her work, with her slippers down at heel, and as active as if she was a young girl of twenty; so that when she heard in the street the sound of voices, and the steps of the returning party, she had just lit the last candle, and Maurice had just placed the last stool round the table.

She ran to throw the door wide open, in order to be the first to give the welcome to the young couple; as she considered it a most important point, according to her theory of omens, that upon re-entering the house, the first time after the giving and receiving of the rings, they should hear words of good luck. She had several times listened attentively, to see whether the celebrated lions, who, on so many occasions, had aided her in penetrating so marvellously, as she thought, into the future, were heard to roar: but, thank heaven, they were still and quiet.

When on the point of drawing back the bolt, she perceived, however, that the broom had been left behind the door (a bad omen, according to the opinion of the women of Florence), and that on the ground, exactly where they would pass, there were two straws lying crosswise.

"That varlet would have broken his arms, I suppose, if he had given a brush hereabouts!" she said, as she seized the broom and swept them away. Then taking in her right hand one of the straws, she threw it behind her back over her left shoulder; and with this potent conjuration, she felt reassured respecting the future fate of the newly affianced couple.

"Health and happiness, my young lady," said the old woman to Laodamia, taking care to pronounce these words, at the very instant when the bride crossed the threshold; and she was going to kiss her hand, but was prevented by a hearty and affectionate embrace from her young mistress, to which she responded warmly, but respectfully. As soon as they were come in, Niccolo said—

"Mistress Fede, I gave no orders for all this display!" But the reproof was tempered by a good-humoured smile, and he went and sat himself down on his seat at the hearth, around which the whole family gathered, awaiting the summons to sit down to table.

Laodamia, who had retired for a moment with her sister, to take off her veil and the garland that adorned her head, had returned; and seating herself by Lambert, was beginning to talk to him about those minute and all-important trifles, that lovers are so skilful in multiplying to infinity; whilst Troilus, Lisa, and her brothers, with their friends, formed a knot by themselves, so as not to be any restraint upon the happy pair. Every countenance beamed with pleasure, and was radiant with smiles; the very rooms too, all resplendent with the lights, set off and adorned with more than ordinary taste and care, appeared quite gay, and everything seemed to promise for that evening, a pleasant and happy reunion; and consequently one very unlike their ordinary evenings, which were marked by afflicting and distressing thoughts; when two loud rings were heard at the gate, and a moment after, a man clad in complete armour, presented himself at the door of the room, in which they were assembled. He stood for a second or two without moving, and looked round, not without creating some astonishment in the minds of those present; many of whom recognised in him the soldier, who, but a short while before, had been noticed by them in St. Mark's; and they were at a loss to imagine who he was, and what he wanted.

"What news have you for us, my good man?" demanded Niccolo; whilst the stranger, in a scarcely audible voice, that proceeded with a muffled sound from his helmet, said, turning to Lambert, and presenting to him a sealed despatch:

"From the Captain-General."

Lambert, quitting the side of Laodamia, rose up to take the missive; and having opened it, he read therein, that he was commanded to arm instantly, mount his horse, and follow the bearer; and so to join the company, which was mustered in the square of San Spirito, to go, wherever ordered, on the service of the State.

What the young man's feelings were, on reading this peremptory order, at such a moment, I must leave it to my reader to imagine.

Laodamia, rooted to the spot, kept her eyes on his face, as he stood reading the paper, and seeing his cheeks flushed, she approached him with feelings of trepidation and alarm. Lambert, looking at her, with a melancholy and tender smile, in order as it were to reassure her, handed the paper to Niccolo, who, looking first at one, and then at the other, was beginning to think something was the matter. He read it twice over, whilst all were intently watching him, and to Laodamia every second appeared an age. At last, raising his eyes to heaven, with a calm but fervent expression, he exclaimed: "Yes, gracious heaven! but at all events, may Florence be safe!" As he pronounced these words, the terrified Laodamia, unmindful of every other consideration, seized the paper from the hand of her father, and had devoured its contents in an instant. She remained for a moment or two, with her eyes cast down and fixed on the paper she held in her hand; then raising them, all bedewed with tears, and with an imploring look, first at her father, then at Lambert, she seemed as if she was begging the consolation of a ray of hope; as if she sought to discover in their countenances a shadow of a possibility, that he might be relieved from this service, or might escape it by some means or other. Instead of this, however, she read in the countenance of both the irrevocable sentence, which consigned her to fresh sorrows, to which she could discover no end; and educated, as she had been by Niccolo, she abandoned entirely the hopes she had conceived, and remained mute with sorrow—but resigned.

When the rest of those who were present, were informed of the circumstances, they all expressed the liveliest concern.

"But how can this be," said Vieri, "if your troop, Lambert, was never to go out of Florence?"

Lambert merely shrugged his shoulders; for he too thought that this was a settled point, and had therefore reckoned, that he could, without interruption, attend to his projected marriage.

"Would it not be possible," interposed Lisa, "to get a substitute?"

At this Troilus stept forward, and said in an eager tone: "Yes, and I will be it; Lambert, my good brother, and you, Sir Niccolo, will not deny me this favour: it is altogether unreasonable, that he should leave his intended bride, and go, no one knows where, at such a time as this.—I'll run to Signor Malatesta, and return with permission to go in his place."

And the hypocritical knave, who knew full well, that he could on this occasion make a great show of generosity at small cost, was hastening to set off; but Lisa secretly gave him a pull of the cloak, and Lambert openly stopped him, by seizing hold of his arm; and as one, who was himself a man of candour and incapable of dissimulation, he believed Troilus's offer sincere, and felt deeply grateful for it.

"I thank thee, brother," he said, looking on him with kindly eyes (and it was the first time) "I thank thee, but it would not consist with my honour. You know what the duty of a soldier is; —but I will not forget this your generous offer." And he grasped his hand warmly.

"Our country before everything, my children!" said Niccolo in a loud voice. "To obey implicitly, and to ask no questions—Lambert, Laodamia—I have told you this before now.—It grieves me to my heart's core; but this is not a time for vain laments—but for bold and energetic action."

Then taking Laodamia by the arm, and bending down to her ear, he said: "Remember what I said to you; show yourself calm and courageous; don't give way too much to your feelings, and to those endearments that unnerve the heart—"

Poor Laodamia, her head hanging down, made a sign of acquiescence; for feeling she was like to burst out into loud sobs, she did not dare attempt to answer by words.

All this time the armed soldier stood motionless, leaning against the door-post. Once or twice, indeed, he had advanced a step or two, as if on the point of saying something; and then, as if changing his mind, had returned to his former position. At that moment, the generous-minded Selvaggia, unable to support the sight of Lambert's grief, or even the tears of her rival, had resolved to come forward and reveal herself, and tell everything. But the power to execute her noble design, and so to give up her chance of seeing Lambert alone, and of talking with him once more, all at once failed her.—"'Twill be brief, this pain—and the last!"—she said within herself; and resumed her first resolution.

Time was pressing. Lambert summoned his servant and said: "Maurice, go and saddle the horses; you will bring my new lance; and as you go out, show this good man, where my arms are kept; perhaps he will do me the kindness, in order to save time, to help me don my armour;—will you not?" (he added, turning to Selvaggia.) "As a favour, will you go and fetch my accoutrements. —You see how few moments I have left; and I would fain not throw them away.—If thou hast ever known" (he added with a smile) "what it is to love—you will not want any further explanation."

Selvaggia, with a heart wrung with anguish, as may well be imagined, but yet delighted to comply with his request, followed Maurice with as firm a step as she could; and returning presently with Lambert's armour, she deposited it on the ground, and began to equip him; and, in order the more handily to buckle the straps, she took off both her gauntlets.

Whilst she was busy on one side, Laodamia also on the other was doing what was required; but no one spoke a word. Vieri, observing the hands of the unknown soldier, was thinking to himself, how ever can a soldier have such fair and delicate hands!—But neither Lambert nor Laodamia at that moment were thinking of anything of that kind.

In the midst of the general grief and silence, the sound of a horse going at full trot over the paved streets was heard. Laodamia remained still and listened.

"Oh, would to Heaven, it were some one sent from the Captain-general to countermand the order! Perhaps it has all resulted from a mistake!—perhaps it was only a jest, after all, to frighten me!"

The horse still came on, and, on arriving at the gate, it stopped.

"Why, I declare it's coming here," said Laodamia, her hopes still rising. She forgot, poor girl, that the stable where Lambert kept his horses was at some little distance, and that it was Maurice, who, having saddled it, in order to make the greater haste, had brought him thither at a brisk trot. The servant coming in, said that the horses were ready;—and so farewell to Laodamia's last hope!

Lambert, armed from head to foot, and splendidly attired, his vizor up, and his countenance pale but composed, embraced Niccolo and all the rest without saying a word. He wished to bid adieu also to Fanfulla; but as soon as Selvaggia arrived, and the purport of her visit became known, he had disappeared without taking leave of anybody. Lambert looked round, and not seeing him, said, "You will salute Fanfulla for me." He had scarce pronounced the words, when Fanfulla himself entered, out of breath, like one who had been running hard. He had his corslet on, and the helmet worn by the infantry, and in his hand he bore a partisan.

"Devil take the fellow who placed the Serristori Palace so far off!" he said, quite out of breath; "and to run a race with one's corslet on, Fanfulla's legs are but little used!—No matter, they have done me this service though. The long and the short is, Sir Lambert, there's no help for 't; you must go.—I ran just to see if they would send me in your stead, as I leave no one behind to weep for me;—and as for this hide of mine, one or two holes in it, more or less, is but a trifle! But it's not to be done. So I have just put on my coat of mail, and here I am, with this wand here in my hand, and will accompany you. If you don't mind having an Infantry man for your comrade—for—owing to an accident—I now serve on foot—but before I die——-Ah, well!—and, Mistress Laodamia, I can tell you Lambert don't want any one to brush the flies from his nose for him:—but no matter—I hope I shall bring him back again to you safe and sound.—And, be sure, I know what I say, and you shall see him again, at all events."

Laodamia ran towards the worthy Fanfulla, her hands clasped, and all but ready to embrace him, for his words seemed to her like the voice of an angel.

"Oh! on foot you shall not go," said Lambert. And he insisted on his taking his servant's horse, at any rate.

Niccolo had fetched, in an instant, a knight's suit of armour, and presented it to Fanfulla; who felt just as if restored to life, and now fit to appear before the world, finding himself quit of that cursed infantry, which he so heartily detested. They then came all together to the gate, where they found Selvaggia already in the saddle. Fanfulla vaulted on to his steed, almost without touching the stirrup; and he could not repress an ejaculation of joy, when he found himself astride a horse, and one of a different mettle, too, to his old Griffin.

Laodamia till this moment had not uttered a word, in order not to disobey her father. She only clung to Lambert's arm, resting her entire weight on him; at last she said in a low and broken voice:

"God preserve you!"

She then closed her eyes, felt the trembling lips of her betrothed imprinted on her hand, and presently heard all three horses start away at full gallop. Her father, drawing his daughter towards him, and embracing her, said, as her head reclined on his bosom:

"You have behaved yourself nobly, my child; you may weep now."

And the poor girl gave vent to her feelings in a flood of tears.

CHAPTER X.

Francesco Ferruccio, whom we introduced to the reader at one of the evening meetings in the house of Niccolo, at the commencement of the siege, was living at that time in Florence, almost forgotten by the governing party, until it was necessary to appoint a Commissioner at Prato; when they sent him there, by the advice of Donato Giannotti, their secretary, who considered it unfortunate, that so able a man should be unemployed at such a crisis. He remained but a short time at Prato; for owing to some disagreement between him and Lorenzo di Tommaso Soderini, the prefect of the district, he was removed to Empoli, a large town situated in the midst of the Val d'Arno, on the Pisan road, about sixteen miles from Florence, by the old road, that leads across the hill of Malmantile.

His conduct in this commissionership was such, as might be expected from his great qualities and the course of his past life. He added new fortifications to the walls of the town, which from being strong were rendered much more so, indeed, impregnable; and when he knew the place could not be stormed, he set about annoying the enemy, who occupied the neighbouring castles, by constant and vigorous attacks; and by this means he soon acquired an extensive reputation, and gained the good opinion of the government and people of Florence.

About this period, he had written to the magistrates, explaining minutely a design he had formed for conducting fresh undertakings; and amongst others, one against San Miniato al Tedesco, at that time occupied by the Spaniards. He requested succours of cavalry; and for this purpose, Amico d'Arsoli and Jacopo Bichi received orders to set out for Empoli, with 100 mounted soldiers; amongst whom, by the machinations of Troilus, Lambert was included; who set out in company with Fanfulla and Selvaggia in the manner already related.

When they arrived in the square of San Spirito, they found the troop already drawn up in two rows, with their front towards the church; to their right, a little on one side, four trumpeters, and on the pavement were the two captains, with their ensigns and two serjeants. Lambert and his companions were the last to arrive, and as they crossed the square at a quick trot, to fall into their ranks, Amico d'Arsoli shouted out to them: "Quick, quick! my masters!" in that gruff tone, that is familiar enough to those, who have had to serve under one of those soldiers, who are strict disciplinarians, and hold in especial horror that class of men, who are called by the French *traînards.*

The troop being assembled, and the muster-roll having been called over by the serjeant, to see that they were all there, Amico d'Arsoli, with drawn sword, turned his horse, and in a loud voice gave the word to advance: "Files right—March!" And so defiling, they came to the Porte al Prato, by which they quitted the city, and proceeded in the direction of Signa.

The night was serene, the air sharp and clear, and the sky, studded with stars, was bright and glittering, as it often is in winter. The soldiers, wrapped in their dark cloaks, advanced at a good pace, forming two long dusky lines on the road, which was all white with frost. The silence was uninterrupted, save by a few words now and then exchanged in a whisper between those who rode together, or by one of them muttering to his horse, if he chanced to stumble; when his rider punished him by a sharp application of the spur. As Lambert arrived last in the square, he was stationed on the left of the troop, and according to the order of the march, was therefore the rearmost. This position, by a curious phenomenon, which doubtless those of my readers who have seen service will have observed, renders it necessary, in order to keep up with the van, to go at a quicker pace. He was therefore obliged every now and then, with the other soldiers of the rear-guard, to trot forward, in order to come up with those who were in advance of them. And then again by degrees they would find themselves behind, and once more pushing their horses forward, recovered their lost ground. But to continue this alternating movement for any length of time, required him to attend to what he was doing, and not to have his thoughts almost entirely directed to Florence.

On any other occasion, this nightly expedition, on a dangerous and important service, would have been to him a real pleasure; but just now (and who could be so hard, as to blame him) his heart was full of sadness, of an indescribable melancholy, as he fancied he saw in this unforeseen impediment, an infallible indication of some fatality pursuing him. For himself, he would have cared but little; but how separate Laodamia's destiny from his own?

Meanwhile the advanced guard of the troop, having passed the bridge at Signa, had already reached the point, where the road takes the direction by the hill, towards Malmantile, and winds for a considerable distance amid ravines, the sides of which are covered with thick brushwood. When Fanfulla perceived that they were on the point of entering these narrow passes, which were well adapted for an ambuscade, he saw, as an old experienced soldier, that the captains would, before advancing into these defiles, form their men in to a compact body, and send forward scouts. Not seeing Lambert at his side, he turned round and observed him coming along at a considerable distance behind. Whereupon he galloped up to him, shouting at the top of his voice: "Spur forward, Sir Lambert, unless you want to hear the harsh music of Amico d'Arsoli. In this furnace, into which we are about to put our heads, he is not the fellow to allow his men to lag behind out of their ranks.—"

Lambert started, and clapping spurs to his horse, soon came up with the rest, and with him Selvaggia, who kept constantly at his side, without ever finding opportunity, or courage to make herself known, or even to say a single word. She was now vexed with herself at having lost the chance, which she had obtained after so much toil and pains, vowing to herself, that she would not be so timid and faint-hearted another time! And just as she joined the main body, the troop halted, by Arsoli's command.

He was very much in want of light-armed infantry to scour the overhanging thickets, and to ascertain that the way was clear; but he had with him only heavy armed soldiers, who were but ill-adapted to clamber up those steep ascents. All he could do, therefore, was to send forward eight grenadiers as an advance guard; and by the time he thought they must have traversed the most dangerous passes, he moved forward with the rest of his men, and entered amid those riven hills, which in the darkness appeared like opaque masses, fashioned into a hundred fantastic forms, wherever their tops were distinguishable on the starry vault of the heaven.

The troop advanced at a quick pace, in compact order; and every man had disencumbered himself of his cloak, in order to have his hands free. Arsoli and Bichi boldly led the way with lance in rest, and the echo reverberated the tramp of the horses, and the clanking of their stirrups against their iron heels. The low, but careless, tone of their voices, which were heard here and there along the ranks, showed the fearless confidence of these men, at a time when the courage of a soldier is exposed to the severest test; that is, when threatened by an uncertain and unknown danger, against which arms and skill are no defence; as was the case on the present occasion, when a small band of the enemy could, merely by rolling stones down upon them from above, have utterly destroyed them all. But these brave men had long ago made a vow to sacrifice their lives to their country; and this vow they almost all fulfilled at Gavinana; where their honoured bones are not even yet reduced to dust, but oftentimes arrest the spade of the countryman, unconscious, how much valour and glory lies buried beneath. Fate, which awaited them there, perhaps ashamed to consign them here to an inglorious and unavenged death, had not placed an enemy in ambush to interrupt their march; and so, having passed under the ancient castle of Malmantile, they descended to Montelupo, and were soon beyond the narrow defile, at the part where the plain of Empoli begins, and the Val d' Arno gradually opens, amid more distant and less abrupt elevations.

The order observed in that part of the march, where danger was to be apprehended, relaxed by degrees, as they entered on more open and safer ground;—and Selvaggia, who had never quitted Lambert's side, began now purposely to rein in her steed, hoping that his horse also, left to itself by its rider, would, of its own natural instinct, slacken its pace, and that thus she might find herself again, alone with Lambert; resolved this time to speak to him—but to say—what?—Poor girl, this was more than she knew, for she was now too well acquainted with Lambert's position, to be able to cherish a shadow of hope; and to disclose the terrible passion, which preyed upon her heart to one, who could only respond to it, with a vain and humiliating pity, was hard indeed. But that love, which seeks to make terms with pride, ought rather to be called self-love; and such was not the nature of Selvaggia's.

"—I shall find words," she thought; "and if I should not, he will see my tears, and my distress; —I will throw myself at his feet, at his horse's feet, and let him trample over me—only let me have a moment's respite from this life of misery and distraction—"

In the midst of these agitating reflections, she found herself, by little and little, dropping in the rear, with no one but Lambert, just as she wished. The deep silence of the night, scarcely broken by the distant rushing of the waters of the Arno, or by the low baying of the dogs in the surrounding farmhouses, enabled her to hear the frequent breathing of Lambert, who, as he rode abreast with her, without so much as opening his lips, probably was unaware of her being by his side. She kept her eye on him, in the hope that he would, some time or other, turn his head towards her, and thence an opportunity arise of putting in a word, merely to make a beginning; but her hope was vain. Nothing therefore remained, but to speak to him; and in order to fix some limit to the suspense, which caused her heart to beat with almost uncontrollable violence, she marked a roadside tree, at a little distance, and said:—"When we get to that tree, I am determined I will speak."—But she arrived at the tree, and such a palpitation of the heart seized her that it seemed like to burst; she opened her lips, some inarticulate sounds came forth, but she could not utter a single word distinctly, and so violent were the emotions that agitated her at that moment, so strong the conflict of her feelings, that, her feeble nature finding no other relief, she gave vent to a flood of tears, and sobbed so loudly, that Lambert, aroused from his reverie, turned sharply round in amazement; for, thinking his comrade to be a soldier, like the rest, it seemed to him a very strange affair.

"Hollo! what's the matter?" he said, drawing up his bridle, and looking intently at Selvaggia, whom he was unable to distinguish in the dark, notwithstanding she had her vizor up. He repeated his question two or three times, without obtaining any reply; and half suspecting that his companion's brain was turned, he at last heard himself addressed in the tremulous accents of a voice, the terrible identity of which he could not fail to recognise: "And if I am powerless against you—for I have shunned you, as you desired me!—if the death I have courted, flies from me—and I cannot help coming where you are, am I to blame? I followed you in silence, without causing you any annoyance—without venturing to say a word—and then I felt I was no longer alone in the world—and if my emotions have overpowered me, if I could not weep so low, as to prevent your hearing me—can I help it? I know all now—I have seen it with my own eyes—I know the fate of a miserable wretch like myself. But, remember!—it's the last time. I only want—I beseech you—"

And here, at a loss what to say, and not a word coming from her lips obedient to her summons, she again burst out into a loud sobbing, her face bent down upon her horse's neck, and her hands resting on the pummel of her saddle.

By her voice, and still more by her impassioned language, Lambert had recognised Selvaggia, and felt his heart misgive him, as he immediately saw, in what an entanglement he was likely to find himself. Unable to offer her any encouragement, he would have sacrificed anything to cure her of this foolish and useless affection; and from the pity he really felt for her, there was nothing he would not gladly have done, to restore her to peace of mind, and to see her happy and tranquil. Even before this encounter, having considered such an event possible, he had already determined what line of conduct to adopt, in case it acctually occurred, with a view to what was best for this poor girl; and he had reasoned thus:—If I let her know the pity that I feel for her, and attempt to console her with kind and affectionate words, her sanguine spirit will continue to cherish some faint hopes; and looking upon me as kind and generous, she will love me more than ever. Should she, on the other hand, find me stern, haughty, and incredulous of her suffering—the remedy will be severe and painful for her—and me too; but that bitter moment over, her regard will, in all likelihood, be changed into contempt, her love into hatred—she will think no more of me after a day or two, and I shall be able to say that I have done her the only service in my power.

We will not take upon ourselves to affirm, that this final determination did not awake some faint regrets in the young man's heart, though he did not confess it to himself; but be that as it may, he was incapable of that puerile and heartless feeling, which the French term *coquetterie*, and which is not confined to the female sex alone. Having well weighed the whole matter, he determined therefore to follow this course; and the misgiving to which we have alluded, was just such as a person feels, when, having some time before formed a resolution, which it is painful to put in execution, he is suddenly surprised, by being called upon so to do.

—Now then, Lambert, he said to himself, with a view to fortify his mind, whilst Selvaggia was speaking; think of what is really for the good of this poor creature, and not of yourself and of your own feelings.—

When he had concluded his deliberations, although he was beyond measure distressed by her heart-rending sobs, he proceeded to say, affecting, as well as he was able, a tone of coldness and irony: "Why, Selvaggia, it's a shame—is it not? —that you didn't live in the time of King Arthur and the Round Table?—for these nightly meetings, these unhappy loves, would have much better suited the forest of Ardennes, by the margin of some enchanted fountain, than the high road to Empoli, in the midst of these corn-fields."—

At these words, Selvaggia's sobbing ceased for a moment. Lambert regarding this as a good augury for the success of his design, continued: "We are, my dear Selvaggia, in the year 1529, and I am but a poor, plain soldier, like the rest, and am no knight-errant; nor do I call myself Amadis de Gaul, nor Galaor, who have been dead and buried this many a year: God's peace be with them!—What in the world can you have got into your head, supposing of course, that you are not making fun of me.—Don't you know, that I am already as good as if I had a wife, and that I must keep my thoughts at home, and mind my own business, and not turn my brain by these adventures of paladins and romancers? I thought ever since that evening, there in Lombardy, on the banks of the Po, these fancies had left you, and that you had come to your senses; and to tell you the truth, I was as far as possible from any thoughts of you;—when, lo and behold, here is my lady again, fresh as a new-blown rose, and matters just where they were."

The poor girl, almost maddened with grief, at hearing these harsh words, was struck dumb; not a sound escaped from her; her head hung down in deep dejection; and Lambert, too, was beset with feelings that may be easily imagined; but yet violently restraining them, he continued: "Come, Selvaggia, it's time to give over this folly; and if you don't do so, I must. All these scenes, these exhibitions, where are they to end?—if you will let this be the last, I shall be only too glad. I cannot do you any good.—Pray, then, leave me in peace; God bless you a thousand times—and farewell."

"Yes, farewell, and for ever," replied the poor girl, almost beside herself; for in her heart, pride and disdain, aroused for a moment, overcame her love; "but first let me tell you—thou serpent, for you are no better—let me tell you, that God is just—and He will repay you in the coin you deserve, and will exact a strict account of you concerning me—for He did not send me into this world, that I should be your plaything—I too, by the eternal God! have a heart, have a soul, have a human form, and am not a viper, nor a demon. Let me tell you that no king, no prince, has ever possessed a treasure, that could be weighed against the heart of this unhappy being, which was yours; but of which you were not worthy, miserable wretch that you are! And not satisfied with thrusting me away; but you must vilify and insult me.—Insults?—outrages?—to me?—and do you think that you are so grand a person?—do you think you can laugh at me, to whom you owe your life? Yes, let me tell you, it was I, and no one else—there upon the Spanish flag-ship, at the battle of Salerno—I received in my breast the iron of the weapon, that was about to pierce you to the heart—I, to save your life, have lived in pain, in misery, in wretchedness—and do you now suppose, that any scorn of yours can reach me?—It is I who have rather to pity you, for God is preparing for you, what you deserve, and sooner than you think—and it is I who tell you so; and I tell you, that that bride of thine, now, in this very moment, whilst I speak, is perhaps where you would not—and they have sent you out of the way, only the more easily to tear her from you. And you—fool that you are!—could not see the trap; but I know who has laid it; I know all about it, but I'll not tell you; though had you have borne yourself differently towards me, I could have told you everything, I could even—you see, miserable creature, what sort of a heart Selvaggia has, yes even, have aided you—but now, if you were to cut me to pieces, you should not extort it from me. No, no, you shall not know what it is; and that Laodamia of yours, neither God nor devil can save her. Tell me, wretched man, do you too now feel a hell within your heart? do you feel it at last?—Well; may it remain with you for ever;—and now, I too say to thee—farewell!—"

To turn her horse's head, to dig the spurs into his sides, and to gallop off at full speed towards Florence, was the work of a moment; and in two minutes, not even the sound of her horse's hoofs was to be heard.

Lambert, in the utmost alarm at what he had heard, and at the darkly-intimated danger that threatened Laodamia, turned hastily to overtake and stop her; but when his horse had bounded forward a few paces, perceiving the attempt to be hopeless, and restrained, too, by the thought that he could not, on any account, desert his colours, he reined in his horse, and with a heavy heart retraced his steps.

A moment's reflection sufficed to calm his fears, regarding the imminency of the danger. In Florence, in Niccolo's house, Laodamia had nothing to fear; and he felt persuaded that, even if the scheme were real, which Selvaggia had disclosed to him, it could never be executed so promptly, and that these menaces had been used by her merely in anger, to make him uneasy and arouse his fears; and in this he was right. However, he soon bethought himself, for precaution's sake, of finding some means to acquaint Laodamia and her father with what he had heard, that they might be on their guard, and try, if possible, to clear up the mystery; and he resolved as soon as he got to Empoli, to send a man off to Florence with that object.

With these reflections he was somewhat reassured; and, continuing his route with his thoughts still intent on what he had heard, he at last became quite composed, being more and more convinced that there was nothing in what Selvaggia had told him. In the course of his reflections he was naturally led to consider, how kind and generous had been the conduct of this unhappy girl towards himself, whom he had repulsed so harshly—for her own good, it was true; but yet it now appeared to him, that his manner had been too unkind; he feared that, with her impetuous and hasty spirit, she would do some rash thing or other; and then to think he could not hinder it—could not even learn for some time, perhaps, what had become of her; and should any bad consequences result, he would be visited with remorse to his dying day! For a moment or two he hesitated, whether he should not ask permission of Arsoli to turn back; but was it consistent with his duty to make such a request?—Was this to comply with the instructions of Niccolo, to set our country before every other consideration? Induced by these reflections to continue his course, he offered up a prayer, that

God of his mercy would withhold this poor distracted girl, from adopting any rash resolution.

Whilst Lambert was thus occupied, Selvaggia's horse, goaded by the spurrings that lacerated his flanks, and terrified by the wild motions of his rider, was flying along with distended and blood-stained nostrils, his tail erect, and his eye wild with affright, hoping to rid himself of a rider, who so unmercifully ill-treated him. The poor animal kept increasing the rapidity of his course, so long as its strength held out; and in a few minutes had re-entered the narrow passes, where the road is more steep and difficult. Here, quite spent, it stopped short, all covered with foam, and trembling violently, and began to kick and plunge, in order to escape from such intolerable ill-usage. And then began the most ferocious and obstinate contest that ever took place between horse and rider. Selvaggia, with knees firmly clenched, and as tightly fixed in the saddle as if nailed to it, could not help obeying whatever impulse the violent motions of the animal communicated to her, which plunged first in this direction, then in that, just as a tree, whose roots are firmly fixed in the ground, but whose waving and flexible top bends in all directions, when the wind sweeps around it. It bounded, and reared, and bolted; and darting suddenly first to this side, then to that, it took up the whole way, and was several times within a hair's breath of tumbling headlong down the steep precipice at the side of the road. No one was a spectator of this extraordinary combat, which lasted some time, until, from mere weariness, they both gave in.

The horse, quite exhausted, stopped all on a sudden, his knees shaking so, that it seemed every moment as if he would fall. Selvaggia placing her hand to her forehead, which was all dripping with perspiration, and recovering her breath, began to look round, and perceived that the grey dawn was already tinging the summits of the hills.

Just at that moment a flight of crows passed over her head, screaming as they flew along. She stood a moment, with her eyes fixed intently on them; and presently, whether it was a transient aberration of mind, or a kind of hysterical convulsion, she burst into a wild laugh, loud and terrific, that made the surrounding solitude ring again. She recollected at that moment, having sometimes seen on the field of battle, flocks of these birds flying about, and uttering screams of joy amid the dead bodies of the slain, all quite busy, and exhibiting, in their way, marks of delight at the rich banquet which awaited them; and blinded by the hatred, which she just now felt, indiscriminately, against all men alike, and by her thirst for vengeance against the ruthless race of human kind, who were the cause of all her wretchedness, she exclaimed, still wildly laughing, and following with her eye those aerial creatures, as they winged their way over her head, till the last disappeared behind the hills: "Oh! may heaven speed your flight, ye crows!"

She then determined to dismount; and having leapt to the ground, she stretched herself at full length on the bank, beside the road, and remained there, without moving, with her mind in a state that may be compared to the twilight, not so dim as not to be conscious of her present condition, nor so clear, as to be able to form a correct judgment respecting it. The ground on which she lay, was covered with a thick frost, which soon thawed all around her body.—The poor girl was in a raging fever.

The cold, and the brief rest she had had, seemed, after a while, to have restored her; and she felt as if the dark cloud that had hung over her senses, was gradually dispersing. Lambert seemed once more to stand before her, as if actually present; she heard the sound of his voice as plainly as if still ringing in her ears; and, with a scornful smile, which, from not being in harmony with the expression of her eyes and the other features of her face, seemed rather a convulsive writhing of the lips, she exclaimed:—

“Oh, oh! make a mock of me!—eh? Scorn and insult too? Look to yourself, my valiant hero—for matters may take a turn, before we've done, and it may fall to my lot to laugh, and to yours to weep!—May Heaven aid me so, as I fail not to use any occasion that may offer itself!—Truly I should rejoice to see this immaculate youth, with his mighty fine virtue, with his bravery, so that everybody seems but dirt in comparison with him; and that wondrous damsel, that angel, that grand lady, I should like to see what they would say, if it came to their turn to implore pity, with arms crossed—and of whom, too?—of Selvaggia, of the courtesan! the vile, abject, miserable Selvaggia!"

She bit her lips, and then raising her finger in a threatening attitude, she went on:—

"What, all against me? Be it so.—And I against all!—Whoever has most flax will make most linen!—We shall see. Hast thou seen how he treats thy love?—Well, betake thyself to hatred, then, henceforth!—thou shalt see how I jest—thou shalt see whether I understand revenge! Let me think on't a minute or two.—Eh! I'll have no common revenge—one of your sort must not be dealt with like one of the rabble——"

And with downcast head, her eyes and cheeks livid and sunk, she remained still, revolving a thousand schemes, which passed, so to speak, over her countenance; just as athwart a stormy sky, the clouds flit along in a hundred fantastic shapes, as they drift onward before the wind.

At length she gave a sudden start, as if a new idea had struck her all at once; she raised her head and kept it in one position, bending it a little on one side, like one whose ear is on the stretch, as if listening intently to a voice, that was speaking to her soul, and then said: "That would be the best of all. Oh! may I but succeed in it!——But shall I have heart enough to go through with it?—"

And from that bosom, that was boiling over with rage and indignation, a sigh forced its way out. Perhaps her project appeared to her too cruel and too terrible.—Perhaps, at that moment, the memory of her love burst forth with fresh life and vigour from her heart, just as sometimes, when we wish to smother a fire beneath the ashes, a little flame shoots out, and after flickering a while, is extinguished and disappears.

It matters little however to seek now the cause of this sigh, as it will probably be unfolded to those, who shall have the patience to finish this tale ; but after having repeated it two or three times, she covered her face with her hands ; and whoever had seen her at that moment, would have concluded from her manner, that she was weeping. Having continued thus for some time, from the sitting posture in which she at first was, she gradually sank down with her face upwards, which was covered by her hands, and remained motionless ; till after a long time, her arms too, as if bereft of all strength, sunk to the ground, at her side.

Her countenance, thus disclosed to view, was pale and thin ; the muscles were no longer contracted by passion ; but her aspect still preserved traces of the terrible tempest, that had passed over that desolate heart. She presented the idea of a landscape, that had been swept by a hurricane ; when, after it is past, over the fields that have been furrowed by the rain, the trees that have been hurled down, and lie along the ground, over all nature, there reigns a deep silence, an awful calm.

At last by slow degrees, she began to sit up again; then with some difficulty, for she felt her limbs bruised and weak, she gained her feet; and coming up to her horse, she adjusted his bridle, and grasping the mane and the saddle-bow, she put her foot in the stirrup, and giving a spring once or twice, she found herself, not without some trouble, on his back. She took the direction of Florence, her body bending forward, and her head drooping on her breast, with such a dispirited and dejected air, that it seemed impossible it could be the same person; and her horse too, from his slow and lagging gait, his ears hanging and his head drooping, scarcely appeared the same, that a short time before had engaged in such a fierce encounter. At the first turn in the road, they both disappeared; and, with the reader's permission, we will leave them to pursue their journey, as Lambert is waiting for us with his troop at the gate of Empoli.

The sun, just risen, with his streaky light was reflecting a rosy hue on the white covering of frost, that glittered on the sides of the hills, and on the trees and roofs of the houses, leaving the parts not illuminated by his rays, distinguished by a transparent azure tint; when the soldier, who was keeping guard on the tower, that overlooked the circumjacent country, saw the troop approaching in the distance, and recognising the lily on the standard, gave notice that the expected succours were in sight; and the news were speedily conveyed to Ferruccio. The Commissary, who had been some time astir (for it was a rare thing to find him in bed, at whatever hour he might be wanted) was occupied at some distant quarter, superintending certain works that were in progress. As soon as he heard the news, he was eager to welcome them, and having ordered the bridge to be lowered, and the portcullis to be drawn up, he directed that the gate should be opened. The troops entered, the trumpets sounding at their head, and preceded by the two captains, who defiling before the Commissary, saluted him by lowering their lances.

Ferruccio, a man of lofty stature and muscular frame, wrapped in a dark cloak, with high boots, and a cap that fell down, covering one side of his face, stood to see them pass, planting himself firmly on his legs, with his arms folded on his bosom, and displaying a brow lofty and severe, beneath which flashed that look of proud defiance, which, owing to the colour of his eyes and the overarching of his eyebrows, might be compared to the glance of an eagle. By a sharp, quick movement of his head, he replied to the salute of the two captains, whilst motioning with his hand, he directed them to draw up their men in files, on the small square, into which they entered, after passing through the gate. The soldiers, who had bound up their cloaks on the cruppers of their horses, and were in the best possible trim, appeared a neat and well-appointed company, and well mounted; and at the word of command, having made the détour of the square, they drew up in line. Ferruccio advanced in front, still with his arms in the same position, and accosting the two officers, who stood in the centre, a little in advance of their men, said to them in a loud voice, and with that short abrupt phraseology, which tells with so much effect on soldiers—"Capital troop this! Men, horses, arms, all good. We shall see them in active service pretty quick; as I was only waiting for their arrival. You will have them served with rations, and then come to me at my quarters.—Are there any news from Florence? The attack of the prince I learnt by letter yesterday. He has found out, by this time, that even traders understand the construction of bastions, and the use of artillery. Now for two words to your men."

And turning to the troop, who stood motionless and silent before him, he said, with a smile—"The Spanish miscreants, that we have to deal with hereabouts, have such cursedly long legs, that I have some difficulty in getting near them; but you will supply our defect on that score, my brave fellows; with good spurs and a stout lance, we shall try the strength of their back-bones, please God. Remember that we are all fighting for our country, and in this sacred cause, I will spare neither my own life nor yours; of this be assured. I will do my duty as an officer, since the government has deemed me worthy of so distinguished a post. Do you do yours, as brave soldiers; should you do otherwise, I am not the man to make light of it. Now betake yourselves to rest and refreshment, as I shall not leave you long with your hands folded together. Long live the Marzocco! Long live the republic!"

To this cry, the troops and people responded; for the latter had collected round in crowds; and whilst the soldiers were dismounting and preparing to lead their horses to the barracks, they said amongst themselves:—

"This is haranguing, with a vengeance!—Aye, his tongue don't mince his words!—This is a devil of a fellow, who wouldn't be likely to pay much respect to the Emperor himself.—My life for't, but one must keep one's eyes about one, with this trooper!"

And one of them, turning to Fanfulla, who was whistling a tune to himself, from a habit he had of so doing, whilst he was throwing the stirrups over the saddle, said to him:

"And what says our friend, brother Bombard, of him?"

"Brother Bombard says: Whenever you raise the wine-flask to your lips, and the commissary calls out,—*enough*—take care you don't let another drop go down your throat, if you wish your gullet to remain open. For I know something of bearded faces, and have seen more than one peep out of a morion, with bristles hard enough in all conscience; but of such as this fellow's, I have in my life seen but two; one was Signor John's, and the other, the great Captain's. And that's all I have to say."

After this, the troops were presently lodged in the quarters, that had been prepared for them.

CHAPTER XI.

As soon as Arsoli and Bichi had consigned their troops to their quarters, they proceeded to the commissary's; Lambert also went with them, for he had been charged by Niccolo (a circumstance we had forgotten to mention) to pay his respects to him, and to inform him of the latest news connected with his family.

Ferruccio was quartered in the Hotel de Ville in the great square, and they found him waiting for them, in a room on the ground floor, the walls of which were covered all over with lilies and lions; and up above were painted the arms of the prefects, who had formerly administered the government of the district; among whom was the conqueror of the Ciompi, Michele di Lando. The commissary was sitting at a large table, which was his court of justice. He welcomed his guests, who entered completely armed, just as they had quitted Florence. He motioned them to sit down, and Arsoli said: "This is Lambert, my lord, whom you know by name, if not personally."

"Ah!" replied Ferruccio, smiling graciously upon him, "I am delighted to make your acquaintance; for I have no dearer friend, than Niccolo de

Lapi, and I know the high regard he entertains for you."

Lambert, hereupon, having first presented the message of Niccolo, went on to inform him of all the circumstances connected with Troilus; telling him how he had left the Imperialists, and joined the party of the Piagnoni. He then referred to his own marriage with Laodamia, and the circumstances by which he had been interrupted in the celebration of it; and seeing that Ferruccio listened to him very graciously, he informed him of the obscure intimation he had received on his route, of some plots or other concocted against her; at the same time requesting permission to despatch a messenger to Florence, to direct them to be on their guard, and to investigate the truth, and origin of this dark scheme.

" My permission you have at once, and if the service of the State would allow of it, I would say,—go yourself; but a good sword just now, is worth its weight in gold, and I cannot dispense with it. I know it must have been a severe struggle for you, Sir Lambert, to leave such a bride, in order to handle a lance—at least so I fancy—" (he said, smiling) " as these are matters about which I know little, and in all my life, I never yet had time to think about the ladies.—However, a young fellow, like you, can very well exercise patience, as our loves now must be with arquebusses and artillery."

" As for that matter, I hope to show you, that

I know my duty; and that my first affections are towards my country, and no one else."

This reply, Lambert uttered with a bold and resolute expression of countenance, that left no room to doubt the truth of it. After this, bowing to Ferruccio, he withdrew, and soon met with a courier, who undertook to convey a letter to Laodamia at Florence. Lambert wrote it as soon as possible, and in it, recounted minutely all that had happened the night of their march, without omitting a word of what had passed between Selvaggia and himself. After giving strict charge for them to use their utmost exertions, to discover the truth or falsehood of this conspiracy, or whether it had been fabricated by her out of sheer spite, intimating that for his part, he was inclined to this latter opinion, he began to deplore and express his regret at the harsh manner he had adopted towards this poor unhappy creature; at the same time, revealing his reasons for so acting, to Laodamia; and in conclusion, discovering the agitation of mind, under which he was labouring, respecting her fate. The interest he felt on this point he manifested, perhaps, too clearly; for, writing with his feelings wrought up, he did not take time to weigh his words with exact nicety, and to judge of their probable effect upon her, who would read them with a more cool and tranquil mind. Last of all, he begged of Laodamia, that she would at once set people on the search, sending them in the direction of Empoli, to try and discover what had become of Selvaggia; and having had so many things to say, and time pressing, he concluded his letter more abruptly, than he would have done, had the case not been one of so urgent a nature.

When he had written it he folded it in four, as was the custom of that time, and having made a hole through it, he fastened it with a thread, the ends of which he united with a seal.

The courier started, and made such speed with his little horse, that about four in the afternoon he dismounted at Niccolo's gate. Mona Fede opened the gate to him; and taking the letter, hurried joyfully into her master's room, where he was sitting with his daughters; and by chance Troilus was there too. Laodamia, perceiving from the address whom the letter came from, exclaimed in high delight, and with a slight blush on her cheeks: "Oh! poor Lambert; he has written to me already!" and began reading it. As she read on, her countenance underwent a gradual alteration, exhibiting at one time surprise, at another sorrow, and at another compassion; but at last, a shade of displeasure seemed to spread itself over her serene brow.

"Oh! it's a matter of great importance," she said at last, anything but composed in her manner; and handing the letter to her father, she added: "Just you look, and see what is to be done."

Niccolo took it, but the reading of it appeared to produce quite an opposite effect on his mind, and rather pleased him than otherwise: "Oh!

he's a noble youth," he said at last; "why, to be sure, we must do as he advises us,—I see no other course."

Then turning to Troilus, to whom he was becoming every day more and more attached, and especially after having witnessed the readiness, with which he had offered to go as a substitute for Lambert, he said to him, glancing at Laodamia, as if to ask her leave: "With Laodamia's permission I should like you to read this letter,—you will see what a noble heart is Lambert's,—and that if you were willing to encounter the shots of the enemy for him, the courtesy was not thrown away."

Troilus, on finding that some inkling of his designs had oozed out, could not help giving a sudden start of surprise, as he couldn't even imagine how it had got abroad, especially in so short a time. The movement that had escaped him, was interpreted by those present in a very different manner; they attributed it to a very natural surprise at so strange a circumstance: and he, seeing the letter did not allude to anybody by name, soon recovered his self-possession.

"Beyond a doubt," he said at last, "we must do as he says. Leave the management of it all to me, as I'll find somebody who will be able to disentangle this mystery. Give me the letter, that I may have the description of this female, so that she may be recognised; and if she is above ground, she shall not elude our search."

Thus saying, he left the room, whilst Niccolo, highly delighted, exclaimed as he went out:—

"Did I not tell you, that 'twould be a hard matter to find such another as that brave youth?"

Laodamia also left the room a minute or two after Troilus, and went up to her own apartment, and shut herself in. She could not, or would not say why, but she was not quite at ease in her mind; and experiencing an indefinable repugnance to examine her feelings just then very strictly, she turned to some of her usual occupations, in order to engage her mind. Had she have descended to this examination, probably she would have come to comment on Lambert's too enthusiastic pity, on the somewhat laconic conclusion of his letter; perhaps she even wished, that it had been left to her, to feel all this compassion for Selvaggia's misery.—In fine, God only knows, what she would have discovered in that sad heart of hers! However, she could not bring herself just then to scrutinise it too closely. But for the seed, that has once fallen in the furrow, what more is required?—it operates unseen, it germinates in silence, and when it gives signs of shooting up above the surface of the earth, it has already put forth its roots.

Troilus, meanwhile, was busily intent on finding out this Selvaggia, who in a manner altogether incomprehensible to him, seemed to be acquainted with his designs; and certainly, neither Lambert nor anybody else, just then, was more interested in discovering her than himself. He sent persons out in all directions, and had every possible search made for some days; but all in vain, no tidings could be obtained of her. Finding at last that all was to no purpose, a letter, to this effect, was despatched to Lambert, (Maurice was the bearer of it, who having got another horse, by this means rejoined his master). It is needless to inquire whether Lambert was distressed and grieved at the result.

In the meanwhile, serving under Ferruccio at Volterra, at Pisa, and at last at Gavinana, he spent a considerable time; during which, the circumstances of Laodamia and of the other actors in this story, experienced no particular alteration. The closing events, which at a later period fell heavily on the family of the Lapi, and with which our tale will conclude, are intimately bound up with the misfortunes of the city, and the utter and final extermination of the liberty of Florence. We must, therefore, with a hasty, and not over finely-pointed pencil, portray, to the eternal infamy of the conquerors, and the eternal glory of the conquered, her last mournful struggle; and describe, how at last she fell, utterly crushed and exhausted.

A few days after the unsuccessful attack, directed by the Prince of Orange against the walls of Florence, Lastra, a strong fort, that commanded the road to Empoli, fell into the hands of the Imperialists; who, after having had it ceded to them, on condition of sparing the lives and property of those within, had no sooner got it into their power, than they executed the garrison, who had bravely defended themselves according to the laws of war, and as the honour and service of their country demanded. At the news of this foul transaction, there arose a cry of indignation and revenge throughout Florence; and the soldiery, who were eager to join once more in close encounter with the enemy, found their captain, Stefano Colonna, ready to lead them to the attack. He directed, that they should sally out some night with about a thousand infantry, all armed with lances and large two-handed swords, with a few arquebussiers, intending to fall unexpectedly on the Imperialists, and not to fight except hand to hand. On communicating the matter to Malatesta, they found him at first opposed to their design; this traitor wanted the city to be gradually exhausted by the hardships and suffering of a protracted siege; and knowing the courage and enthusiasm of the troops, he was afraid, that, some time or other, these fierce attacks would succeed in compelling the Imperialists to raise the siege. However, he was obliged to acquiesce, for fear of letting out his designs.

On the night of the 11th of December, which was dark and rainy, Stefano Colonna sallied forth, surrounded by his body-guard, lance in hand, having directed every soldier to put a shirt over his corslet, in order that they might be known to each other in the dark. As soon as they had begun the attack, others were to issue forth from the various gates of the city at a signal-shot from Mario Orsino; and Malatesta had reserved to himself the power of sounding a retreat by the blast of the trumpet, whenever he deemed it advisable. Having made a sudden attack on the outpost of the company of Sciarra Colonna at Santa Marguerita à Montici, they threw it into such disorder, that after a short and feeble attempt at resistance, and the loss of a good many on the side of the enemy, they put them to the rout; and pursuing their advantage, and fighting on, they pushed forward, no longer secretly and in silence, but with loud cries, to the sound of drums and trumpets, so that all the camp was roused by the uproar and rushed to their arms. The prince and his officers were hurrying hither and thither, to arrest their assailants and make head against them, and to rally their dispersed and fugitive men; by which means, the Imperialists, too, began to fight with some degree of courage. It now appeared the proper time for Mario Orsino to give the signal agreed on; and at the discharge of two large cannon, there burst forth, from the different gates, the bands that had been stationed there for that purpose; and on several points of the camp they made so furious an attack, that the prince, at a loss which way to turn, (for on all sides fresh enemies were assailing him) threw himself into the thickest of the encounter, fighting desperately, as he looked upon himself as already undone, and no better than a lost man. And indeed the event would have been as he expected, so astonishingly did the Florentine soldiery repulse the hardy veterans of the German and Spanish regiments, if Malatesta, who saw that he was on the point of losing, in a moment, the fruit of all his treachery, had not caused the trumpet to be sounded, (a sound, at that moment, truly inauspicious and mournful,) which gave the signal for a retreat, and, at the same time, snatched the victory out of the grasp of those brave and noble citizens. They retired with evident reluctance, and in good order, without being pursued or annoyed by the enemy, who found they were getting off much better than they expected.

This glorious achievement, increased in no slight degree the courage of the Florentines, and their desire to go out again to attack the enemy; and also opened the eyes of Malatesta to what he might expect, unless he found means to thwart and hinder their project. It is scarce credible, with what pretexts, what artifices and frauds, he succeeded even to the end of the siege, in this nefarious scheme; so that, either the soldiery failed in gaining their object of being led out to encounter the enemy; or, if they were, matters were so arranged by the traitor, that their efforts were ineffectual; until famine, wounds and deaths had so reduced them, that he could dispose of them as he pleased.

It is difficult to understand how the Florentines should have failed of detecting his treachery. But the history of states and of governments is full of such delusions, and they have ever been the precursors and symptoms of their impending downfall.

The period having arrived for the re-election, or for the changing of the Gonfalonier, the election fell on Raffaelle Girolami, instead of Carduccio, and he was the last to occupy the palace in that capacity.

The hopes of assistance from their allies became fainter every day, until they were utterly extinguished. Francis I., in order to excuse himself from helping the Florentines, had advanced the pretext, that he wished first to get back his sons who were left as hostages in Spain ; but when he did get them back, it was all the same, for he did not alter his line of conduct; and abandoning these, the most ancient and faithful allies that the crown of France possessed in Italy, he wrote to his General Stefano Colonna, to withdraw from them, and recalled his ambassador to the republic, regardless of his baseness, provided he could be the friend of the emperor. The old cause of Italy's ruin, to trust to the promises of France, or (to be more correct) of those ambitious spirits, who make a plaything of her, and toss her about, like a ball, first to one, and then to another.

But to find an example of such perfidy, it was not necessary at this time to cross the Alps. The Venetians also, trampling under foot the promises and treaties of the League, made separate terms for themselves with the Emperor; and when the news of this transaction reached Florence, where they had not the faintest suspicion of it, the citizens, highly enraged, cried out in the squares and streets: "*That's a specimen of Venetian fidelity!*"* But these new and unexpected blows not only did not cool the ardour of the Florentines in defending themselves, but rather inflamed it, by the impulse given to it by a fresh sense of wrong, and the noble pride of being alone sufficient against such a host of enemies.

To meet these formidable dangers, extreme, and oftentimes cruel, measures were resolved on; as for instance, the decree respecting the property of the Palleschi. Five commissioners were appointed, called Syndics of the rebels, and a law passed, which it would be too long to cite at full, but which, in substance, put their possessions entirely into their power, giving them authority to sell them, and even arbitrarily to compel the citizens to become purchasers of them, in case they did not voluntarily come forward to do so; and, what was especially opposed to all rules of justice, taking effect even restrospectively, it being allowed by this law, to nullify many contracts of a previous date, where there was the least pretext for it. A barbarous law, it is true; but in the sight of God, who will be found most guilty, the Pope, who aimed at the ruin of Florence, or the Florentines, who, reduced to the extremities of despair, had no other alternative, but to adopt these unjust measures, or to perish?

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* The doge Gritti, being questioned by the Florentine deputy, who expressed his fears of what afterwards actually came to pass, had said in reply, "This republic never did do dishonourable things, nor will it begin now."

But as even these resources were not adequate to meet the insupportable expenses of the war, they were soon under the necessity of appropriating the gold and silver vessels of the churches, and of private individuals; who, with wonderful alacrity, brought forth their plate; and the females, their necklaces, bracelets and other jewels to the mint; where a new piece was coined, of the value of half a ducat, with the lily upon it and the letters S. P. Q. F., and on the obverse, *Jesus Rex noster et Deus noster*.

In the giving of their gold and silver for the service of the State, it will be readily imagined, that Niccolo did not come behind the rest. Even the urn, that contained the ashes of Savonarola, he surrendered! The ashes themselves he collected carefully, and consigned them to one of the bags of silk and gold, that formed part of Laodamia's marriage portion, and which she readily offered for the purpose; and this was placed in the niche, where the urn formerly stood.

In order to inflame, still more, the general feeling, and to induce the citizens to acquiesce more readily in the sacrifices they were called on to make, the exhortations of the clergy, and the pomps of religion were invoked; the friars of St.

Mark's, and of these, especially Fojano and Fivizzano, never ceasing to deliver harangues in the churches and public places, in the manner and spirit of Savonarola; and their glowing and animated appeals, rendered still more impressive by the austerity of their rule of life, which they observed with the most rigid exactness, had no small influence on the brave and unyielding spirit, displayed by the Florentine people. These friars, well aware of the power of unusual and extraordinary circumstances to move the multitude, often availed themselves of theatrical actions; as Fojano, when speaking before the Council, after a long and animated address, produced a flag, on which was painted, on one side, Christ Victorious, with several soldiers lying at his feet, and on the other, the cross; and handing it to the Gonfalonier, he ended, by pronouncing the miraculous words, which sounded in the ears of Constantine, foretelling his impending victory.

The impulse communicated, by such means, to men already inflamed with a thirst for liberty and glory, displayed itself, not only in the actions fought by bodies of men, but also in feats of prowess by individual soldiers. One soldier perceiving, on a certain occasion, that the enemy maintained but a negligent look-out at an entrenchment, advanced alone beyond the walls; and having climbed up to the platform, he succeeded in tearing down an ensign, that was fixed on the top; and, amid a shower of balls, effected his return with it, unharmed, to his comrades.

The spirit of the paladins of Ariosto, and of the romancers of that age, appeared transfused into the soldiers of both parties, and gave birth to challenges and duels, fought with all the forms and ceremonies of the ancient chivalry. A knight in the camp of the enemy sent a trumpeter, offering to do battle on horseback with any cavalier amongst the besieged; which challenge was accepted by Primo da Sienna. In the encounter, this latter broke his lance against his adversary's cuirass, and with a sharp fragment of the shaft, that remained in his hand, he inflicted a slight wound on his arm; whilst the other knight pierced the saddle-bow of his opponent with his lance, but without doing him any injury, his lance flying out of his hand by the shock of the encounter; whence he was adjudged vanquished.

But of far greater interest was the duel between Louis Martelli and Giovanni Bandini, related by Varchi in its minutest details. We should be glad if we could transcribe the entire account; but its length precludes us from so doing; besides that it is unnecessary, from its having been already given to the world. The facts of the case may, however, be comprised in very few words. These two young knights had been for some time rival competitors for the love of Marietta de Ricci, afterwards wife of Niccolo Benintendi; Bandini was the one she most favoured. This latter, being at this time in the Imperialist camp, a cartel was sent to him by his rival, denouncing him as a traitor; because that, he was bearing arms against his country. Bandini denied the charge, alleging that a visit to his friends was the object of his going thither, and that it was with no intention of joining their ranks; but his denial not being accepted by his adversary, an appeal to arms was resolved on; and Bandini, in order to clear himself of the stigma that had been fastened on him, of being more wily than brave, chose, for the encounter, no other defensive arms than a mail gauntlet for the right hand, with sword and dagger.

Dante da Castiglione was associated with Martelli, as his second; and Bertino Aldovrandi with Bandini.

They fought at Baroncelli, where at the present day is the Poggio Imperiale. Dante, by a thrust in the face, killed Bertino. Bandini struck Louis Martelli in the forehead, and the blood, that issued from the wound, running into his eyes and blinding him, he was obliged to surrender: and after being carried into Florence, in a short time died from vexation, at having so ill succeeded in his feat of arms.

The thoughts of the Florentines being soon diverted to operations of more consequence, and Malatesta no longer able to restrain their eager desire to be led out against the enemy, he so managed, as to have them conducted to a position, where it was impossible that they could strike any effective blow, but would themselves be exposed to imminent danger. Octavian Signorelli, sallying forth from the porte San Pier Gattolini with the bravest and best appointed bands, assaulted the intrenchments of Mount Olivet, which were defended by Baracane, at the head of the best infantry of Spain; whilst, from the porte San Friano, Bartolommeo dal Monte and Ridolfo d'Assisi led other troops to the enemy's rear. On this occasion, too, the Florentine soldiery behaved themselves admirably; and the Spanish captain being killed, they were very near routing the best soldiers, at that time, in Europe; but their adversaries' strength being constantly reinforced by the incessant supplies of fresh troops, which were despatched by the prince to repair the losses made in their ranks, they were at last obliged to retire; and retreating in the best possible order, without confusion, into the city, left a great number of their comrades on the field; amongst whom, was Louis, son of the celebrated Niccolo Machiavelli.

The unfortunate result of this encounter served the purpose of Malatesta to show, that he was not wrong in disapproving their going out to engage the enemy, but yet failed to open the eyes of the Florentines to his traitorous designs; for, upon his manifesting a great desire to obtain the rank of captain-general of the foreign troops, the duties of which office he had, till this period, exercised, without expressly having the title, the Seigniory resolved to gratify him, as they could not prevail upon Stefano Colonna to accept it for himself.

In the presence of all the people, therefore, and the Gonfalonier with the Seigniory ranged on the tribune, the Captain-general's bâton was solemnly committed to Malatesta. To mark this festive occasion, the marzocco or stone lion, which was placed in front of the palace, was crowned with garlands, and a coronet of gold set upon its head. And the *complaisant* traitor, richly dressed, and with a medallion in his cap, on which was inscribed *Libertas*, pronounced a long oration, thanking the people, and offering to risk his life in defence of their freedom, with all the customary profusion of oaths and promises, by which the multitude always have been, and always will be, duped.

Whilst this traitor was thus deluding the unconscious Florentines and obtaining these honours, other traitors of a meaner stamp were being punished and persecuted in a variety of ways; for it ordinarily falls to the lot of lesser delinquents, to suffer those punishments, which greater ones, owing to their superior astuteness, know how to avoid.

Heavy fines were awarded against some officers, who had fled from Florence with their troops; and being dressed up in effigy, they were swung to a gallows by the leg, on the bastion of San Miniato, towards Giramonte, in sight of the enemy; and a paper appended to their necks displayed the name of each in large letters, denouncing them as renegades, traitors, and villains. Andrea del Sarto afterwards painted them on the façade of the exchange, although he gave out that the work was his pupil's, Bernardo del Buda, unwilling to have the reputation of being a painter of felons.

A Franciscan friar, Vittorio Franceschi was executed on the gallows for having spiked some guns; and Lorenzo Soderini met with a similar fate, he having been discovered to be a spy of Baccio Valori's.

All this time, in spite of the precautions and exertions of the government, the famine grew worse and worse. After having, in the first months of the siege, consumed the wheat, and other grain that was fit to make bread of, they began to grind up everything in the form of vegetables; and he was fortunate, who could get even such food as this. It may serve, to give an idea of the prices of the better sort of provisions, to mention that the flesh of the horses killed in battle, sold for two grossone a pound, asses' flesh for a carline, a cat for forty soldi, and a mouse for a julio, and after the siege there were scarce any to be seen.

At first their difficulty in obtaining provisions was not so great; for the country people plentifully supplied them, being induced to do so by the enormous gains they made, as the city remained accessible for several months in the direction of Fesolé. But when a band of Germans had got possession of San Donato, they exercised the strictest vigilance, to prevent anything from entering Florence; and they inflicted such horrible tortures on the poor country people, who fell into their hands, that soon, no one was found bold enough to attempt so hazardous an undertaking. Bentivoglio, a soldier in the Imperialist camp, describes, in his second Satire, the cruel treatment of a poor country lad, who was taken, when in the act of driving an ass laden with hay and corn into Florence. His person was first mutilated by eight Spaniards, he was then fixed on a spit, and roasted alive at a slow fire, having been larded in the same way as is done with game.

But not even did famine itself subdue the fixed resolve of the Florentines to defend themselves; and the news that daily arrived of the frequent and successful enterprises of Ferruccio, rendered this resolution stronger than ever. He had made himself master of San Miniato, as he had promised he would, being himself the first to mount the walls, which were taken by storm; and the inhabitants of Volterra having withdrawn their allegiance, and gone over to the Pope, he earnestly pressed the authorities in Florence, that he might be commissioned to reduce them also to submission; urging upon them, to use no delay for fear of their having time to overpower the commissary Bartolo Tebaldi, who having retired into the fortress, was bravely defending himself.

We have the good fortune to be able to lay before our readers, the very letter despatched by Ferruccio to the Seigniory; in which he gave an account of his operations on this occasion.

“ To the Ten Commissioners of War!—*

“ We arrived here on the 20th, about three in the afternoon, and we had to force an entrance into the fortress by the aid of artillery; and when we had all gained the redoubt, I ordered the infantry to make their way in, and the cavalry to take the saddles from their horses, and one by one I introduced them into the citadel, giving orders that they were immediately to recruit themselves, albeit I found not the wherewith; for the closest search throughout the fortress produced no more than six barrels of wine, and just so much bread, as sufficed to furnish half a loaf a piece, and no more; and I verily declare, that had I not have had the aforethought to cause every man to take bread for two days, and moreover, to bring along with me two loads of saltpetre, and a score or a score and a half of pioneers with pick-axes, and other matters, requisite to the storming of a town, and a load of fine gunpowder for the arquebusses, that it would have been more than probable, that the victors would have been the vanquished, without the trouble of a battle. When the men had refreshed themselves somewhat, I ordered them to form in battle array, and I bade them to open the gate, that looketh on the town, and with

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* Copy taken from Cod. No. 17 of the Rinuccinian Library. I am happy in being able, on the present occasion, to express my gratitude to the Marquis Rinuccini for his courtesy in permitting me the use of his library.—M. D'A.

" flags flying I assailed them on three sides; and in " each direction, we encountered earthworks and " entrenchments; in attempting to pass which, " there fell fifty or sixty of the bravest troops, " what with our men and those of the enemy; " but all this notwithstanding, we made our way " over them, and when we had so done, we assailed " them in the great square of St. Augustine, where " they had most strongly entrenched themselves. " What caused us most annoyance was, the being " attacked by three separate bands at once, in " consequence of their having formed a passage " from house to house, and so assaulting us, without our being able to assault them in return. " The enemies' forces made our infantry somewhat " to waver; for there were two pieces on the top of " the entrenchments in the aforesaid square, and " they discharged them each twice, with some " damage to us. When I saw this, I was obliged " to do what appertaineth not to my office; and " thereupon seizing a buckler, I proceeded to " give some smart blows to those who were turning their backs on the enemy. At last I " mounted the earthworks with a body of light " cavalry, fully equipped, each with a lance in his " hand, and some choice soldiers that I have with " me; and having made themselves masters thereof, they advanced forward, fighting bravely; and " so we gained their main position, artillery and " all, killing a good many of them, and taking " from them two standards; and here we lost an

" officer. After this we proceeded to attack them " from house to house, so that we fairly got the " upper hand of them. By this time, night came " on, and we could make no further advance, and " were so weary, that not one of the infantry " could stand on his feet. I ordered my men to " draw off the guns we had taken from them, close " under the citadel, and stationed guards over " them; and I appointed Camillo with three captains to mount guard in the great square: and " in this way we remained till the next morning, " when I again formed my men in order of battle, " to renew the attack. We found that they had " been all night raising barricades, and lining the " streets with some heavy guns; but for all this, " we were not afeared that matters would go " according to their wishes: for being alarmed at " our having made ourselves masters of a part of " the town, and seeing so many lie dead in the " streets, and that those Florentine traitors had " fled away, with the great Ruberto Acciaoli, " their head man, they gave us an intimation that " they wished to come to a parley; whereupon " I gave a safe pass to the commissary Taddeo " Guiducci, and whoever else of the town came to " confer with me, desirous of knowing what terms " I insisted on. I replied to them that I wanted " the town for your lordships, my masters, either " with their will or without it, and that I should " reserve in my own bosom both the good and the " ill, that I purposed, with respect to the inhabi-

"tants. So they desired of me the space of two "hours, so as to be able to consult with the chief "men of the town, saying they would return with "full powers to treat. This I was not minded to do; "because I saw that they wanted to tie my hands, "till the succours should arrive, that were on the "way. I allowed them so much time, as that "they could make their way back within the "trenches, giving them to understand, that unless "they returned within half-an-hour, agreeing to "what I had laid on them, that I would set about "finishing the business by force of arms, as I had "begun. So they went their way, and returned "within the time, bringing with them Captain "Giovan Batista Borghesi, who was the colonel "of all the other captains. When they came "before me, they submitted themselves entirely "to me, and said that the Volterrans referred "themselves to my absolute disposal. I accepted "their submission, giving my promise to spare the "lives of the commissary, and of all the regular "troops; and thus much I have observed; having "directed them at once to pass in their ranks "through the midst of our troops and make their "way out of the town. And because Taddeo "Guiducci appeared to me, in our present circumstances, of too much importance, to leave at "liberty, I have kept him by me, but with no "intention of doing him any harm, having pledged "my faith to him; and what is more, he having well "merited it, by some good services since rendered "to me. Wherefore, I pray your Lordships, that "you would vouchsafe to pardon him, so far forth "as I have promised him, since I have, as I have "said above, pledged to him my honour, to spare "his life.

"When the Imperialist soldiers were gone, I "took possession of their place of arms, and appointed the light cavalry to guard the artillery, "and stationed guards at the gates; and when I had "allotted the quarters, which now were not in "the suburbs, I caused proclamation to be made, "that every inhabitant of Volterra who was found "with arms in his hands should be liable to execution. To-day I will make a search, and will "deprive them entirely of their arms, so that they "may no longer be able to use them against us, "as they have on this present occasion. Also today an order will be published for an inspection "of all the granaries of wheat, whereof I hear "there be a great plenty; and the flour, and other "meal, I will have stored up in the citadel with "all possible despatch, and all the artillery sent by "Andrea Doria; for it seemeth, verily, as if they "had got them made, on purpose to give them up "to us by way of compensation. Of the ordnance "taken from Ruberto, there are two seventy "pounders and two culverins; than which, never "saw I better, nor better mounted; also a field-piece and a mortar; which make six large guns "with eighty balls, together with a small quantity "of powder, and some saltpetre; and to-morrow, "which will be the 28th, I shall send a trumpeter "to Pomarance, and another to Monte Catino; "and of such other matters as shall transpire I "will keep you informed.

"When your Lordships shall judge it opportune, "you will give me orders to advance in the direction "of Maremma, to deliver Campiglia, Bibbona, "Buti, and the whole country, and those highway "robbers shall be hunted out, who are there "housed; and as soon as the tidings reach me, that "Fabbrizio has advanced in the direction of Pisa, "I will not fail to despatch what forces I can "thither; nor will I omit to send a troop to "Empoli for its better security; albeit, it is so "defended by art, that the women with their distaffs may very well guard it. Other matter I "have none to add, except to pray that you will "acquiesce in guaranteeing the faith, plighted by "me to Guiducci; and this I ask, as the reward of "all my toils and hardships.

"*July*, 1530."

The Volterrans having been thus subdued, returned once more under the Florentine yoke; and a yoke it might very properly be called, for deprived of all liberty, and not over well-treated in other respects, they had no voice in the public deliberations. The unjust measures adopted towards them, no less than towards Pisa, Pistoia, and their other dependent cities, effectually prevented their willing cooperation for the defence in the common danger, and served but to increase their difficulties; as they were obliged to employ a considerable part of their forces, in keeping them in subjection. So true is it, that the oppression of the weak generates disaffection, which, like a hidden spark, smoulders for a time unheeded and despised, but at last bursts out into a flame, and consumes the oppressor.

Of this truth Florence furnished a melancholy example; nor will the just admiration, with which her last gallant defence inspires us, hinder us from denouncing the crimes and follies, which contributed to her downfall. Would it be believed that among the Statesmen of that day, this sentiment was a common one: *Pisa must be ruled by fortresses, and Pistoia by parties?* Would it be credited, that the inhuman device of stirring up animosities, the consequence of which was that the Cancellieran and Panciatican parties inundated the hills and vallies of Pistoia with blood, could be called reasons of state, and that it should be considered not only expedient, but lawful and honourable, to adopt such a course? Whether the Florentines were wise in all this, the result showed, when the siege was brought to a close; and when, if Ferruccio could have arrived beneath the city walls, it was almost impossible, but that he would have saved it. But, partly deceived, and partly persuaded by Captain Melocchi di San Marcello, who was more bent on the destruction of his enemies than the salvation of Florence, he was so tardy, as to expose himself, in an evil moment, to be attacked and routed, as we shall see, by the Imperialists. Such was the fruit, which the Florentines reaped from their profound and sagacious *reasons of State!*

CHAPTER XII.

The joy that diffused itself throughout Florence by the reduction of Volterra, was soon allayed by the loss of Empoli; which, being left by Ferruccio to the care of Andrea Giugni and Piero Orlandini, was, owing to their cowardice, stormed and sacked by the Imperialists; who, after achieving this conquest, directed their march to Volterra under the command of the Marquis del Vasto, Inigo Sarmiento and other chiefs; and forming a junction with Fabrizio Maramaldo, they attacked the place on all sides, hoping to wrest it from Ferruccio; who, without being at all dismayed by the overwhelming forces of the enemy without, or the disaffection of the citizens within, continued to defend himself with such signal courage, that, at last, after the loss of a great many men, despairing of success, they raised the siege.

On this occasion it might be seen, how the spirit of a single man, like a spark lighting on a mass of gunpowder, is sufficient to inflame the hearts of thousands. The Florentines, fired by the bold and rapid successes of Ferruccio (although a new and more formidable enemy was now added to swell their losses, and the plague breaking out in the monastery of Santa Agatha, was beginning to spread through the city), resolved to make another sortie on the Germans, who were posted under Louis de Lodrone in the monastery of San Donato.

Malatesta, as usual, opposed their design; nor did he give his consent, till he found that he stood alone in his opposition to the general opinion; the project therefore being resolved on, it was arranged that the soldiers should wear linen over their armour for the purpose of recognising one another. Stefano Colonna sallied forth from the Porte di Faenza, with two thousand infantry armed with spears and partisans; from the gate al Prato, Pasquino Corso with his company; and Malatesta going out by the Porticciuola, drew up his troops along the banks of the Arno, to prevent the enemy from fording the river, and so taking their assailants in the rear.

It was within two hours of the dawn, and owing to the excessive heat, the enemy were buried in deep sleep. Pasquino advancing more quickly than his orders directed, the guards at the first intrenchment were roused, and gave the alarm; which being heard by Stefano, caused him to rush forward to the assault. Overcoming every obstacle, and driving the Germans before him, who defended themselves in a very disorderly fashion, from being but half-awake and terrified at the suddenness of the attack, (whilst their confusion and alarm was increased by a quantity of grenades, cast among them) Stefano came up with his troops to storm the monastery.

The Count de Lodrone had in the meantime drawn together a body of some two thousand Germans, who with levelled lances were preparing to defend themselves from the furious assault of Ivo Biliotti (who, as Varchi tells us, lowering his head, as his custom was, rushed forward against the enemy, shouting to his soldiers: *Forward, my brave fellows, and go at 'em!*) and of the other captains and young Florentines, who fought that night with such desperate fury, that it was long after a subject of wonder to those veteran and hardy troops, who could scarce resist their furious onset. Whilst this obstinate encounter was going on, to the disadvantage of the Germans, the day broke; and the uproar having reached the prince's camp, he had hastily despatched a large body of cavalry to the assistance of his troops; but when it was the duty of Malatesta to charge them, and drive them back at the passage of the river (which, by checking the arrival of the succours, would have aided the attack of the Florentines) he, on the contrary, like a traitor as he was, retired within the walls, and sent orders to Stefano to sound a retreat.

The soldiery, thus shamefully betrayed, were obliged to obey the order, for fear of their retreat being intercepted; and with their front still towards the enemy, who were but little disposed to annoy them, they retired in good order to the city gates; and having at last some suspicion of Malatesta's designs, there began to arise whispers of treachery among the people, and misgivings relative to his conduct.

But these suspicions, and the disposition to counteract them, came too late. Malatesta, having long ago anticipated the possibility of being suspected, and even found out, had so made his arrangements, that such a contingency should find him neither unprepared nor undefended. By conversing with the most eminent among the citizens, he had been able to win them over, whatever might be their political opinions; "to the popular party" (we use the words of Busini) "he talked of liberty; to the malcontents, of the pope; to the ambitious, he denounced this party and that, and praised an oligarchy," &c. By such arts, having succeeded in persuading every class of citizens that he held by their views, he was never without some friend or other to defend him from the charges, which were brought against him in public, just as at last he was in no want of persons, more deceived than culpable, to aid him in perpetrating his vile and nefarious treachery.

Besides all this, as he began to perceive that the Seigniory distrusted his fidelity, he had removed from the Serristori palace, and had taken up his quarters in the Bini mansion, under the pretext of being more within reach of the scene of action; but really and truly, to be nearer to the Roman gate, the tower of which, well defended and provided with necessary stores, was in the hands of men devoted to his cause, and might serve him as a place of safety if matters came to extremities; which in fact they did at last. He seldom appeared abroad; and when he did, he was always well attended; above all, he took care to have strong guards posted, night and day, around his residence; and when summoned to the palace, either declined to go, or if he did on any particular occasion, he had the gate and staircase lined with a great number of his own soldiers, lest, as he said, he should have to take Baldaccio d' Anghiari's leap.*

Thus relieved of all fear of surprise, and considering the train of events fitly disposed, and the opportunity for action ripe, he prepared by new artifices to reap the fruits of his schemes. Ferruccio, who from Volterra had advanced to Pisa by Maremma, and on whom the last hopes of the city now rested, had received orders to march to Florence; and it seems beyond a doubt, that had he attacked the Imperialist camp, at the same time as the Florentines assailed it from the city, they would have succeeded in compelling the enemy to raise the siege. Malatesta, who, more than anybody else, regarded the success of such an enterprise as certain, arranged, by means of a trusty dependant, named Squinting Cencio, to have a secret interview by night with the Prince of Orange, under the walls outside the Roman gate; what was the nature of the negotiations that took place between them, was never known; but it seems probable, that the traitor informed the prince of Ferruccio's movements, and promised him not to undertake any operations against the camp, whilst he was gone to give battle to the commissary; this promise he gave him in a document of his own handwriting. Certain it is, that this document was found on the prince's person, when he was slain in battle a few days after.

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* A captain of infantry, who having fallen under the suspicions of the Seigniory, was summoned to the palace, and there killed, and his body hurled from the window into the street below. His widow was the excellent and virtuous Anna Lena, the foundress of the convent of that name, to which she retired after her husband's death, and there ended her days.

Malatesta's design was completely successful; and in the rout at Gavinana, which took place shortly after, the prince and Ferruccio were left dead on the field, and the last hope of safety that remained to the Florentines was utterly extinguished. The course of this story will furnish us with an opportunity to recur to the particulars of that memorable battle; but we must first return to the principal personages in our tale, for the history of public events which we have detailed up to this point, brings us to a period in which the fortunes of the Lapi family, the main object of our task, appear to claim some of our attention.

The evening of the 4th of August was remarkable for being very sultry; the dull and oppressive atmosphere seemed to become thicker and darker by a lurid and heavy mist, that rendered breathing difficult. The sun's orb, as it dipped in the horizon, appeared of a purple tint, and dilated by the interposing vapours; and just the tops only of the different edifices were tinged by it with a dull and ensanguined hue. Between the four massive pillars, that the bold genius of Arnolfo di Lapo reared on the tower of the palace to support the castle, all on a sudden, the great bell of the council chamber was seen moving, around which were inscribed the words: — *Mentem sanctam, spontaneam ad Dei gloriam et patriæ liberationem habeto*—slowly it swung at first, and then displaying its huge mouth, as it revolved more and more rapidly, the heavy clapper struck the first blow on its walls of bronze, and a loud and prolonged vibration rung through the air, followed by numerous others; as its sounds now boomed forth in rapid succession. The sound of this bell, that for so many ages, and amid all the varied fortunes of the city, had summoned the inhabitants to consult on matters connected with the glory or the dangers of the state, was now heard on an occasion, the most mournful and terrible, that had ever lighted on the country.

News had been received at the palace of the defeat at Gavinana and the death of Ferruccio; of him, whom the Piagnoni styled the modern Gideon, and with whom perished all hope of assistance from without. The countenances of the citizens, who thronged the public square, and the streets leading to it, darkened by the heat of the sun and the smoke of so many battles, seamed with scars, and reduced by hunger and privation to the appearance of skulls, covered over with wrinkled skin, were stamped with profound and hopeless grief; but it was the grief of unyielding and indomitable souls.

After so much fighting, after so many victories, and such bold, yet successful feats, at the very point of reaping the fruit of all this, when every one was expecting to hear:—The commissary is in sight—he is attacking the enemy—he is beating them—he has conquered—he is now entering by the gate of Faenza—here he is—we are safe!—instead of all this, to hear the terrible words:—the army is routed, and he himself killed!—It appeared quite impossible to many; as there are some beings, so venerable and glorious, that it seems as if no ball or weapon could ever strike them down!—And yet the fact was certain, and the sentence irrevocable. The thought, often latent in their minds, but which, always and on every occasion, served as a last refuge to their wavering hopes, the thought:—Ferruccio is alive!—this was now fled from every bosom, and there remained in its stead only the tremendous certainty of impending and inevitable ruin. Whither indeed could this miserable and undone people turn for consolation, threatened without by the overwhelming power of the emperor and the pope, abandoned by all; and beset within by famine, pestilence, and treachery? How bear up against still further sufferings, how look on their wives, their children, and their sires, and see them pine away? How have the heart to face fresh dangers, to protract a long and useless struggle, which they could not but know was doomed to an unfortunate issue? What should we expect to be the determination of a high-minded, enduring, and daring people at such a crisis, but to yield to necessity and surrender? And what was the determination of the Florentines—what the universal cry that arose?—To defend themselves,—to defend themselves to the last extremity.

On the square, in front of the palace, which at that time preserved its august and ancient simplicity, and was not adorned, as at the present day, with the fountain of Ammannato, nor by the groups of Cellini and Gian Bologna, there was a crowd of people, composed of men of every age, and every rank, of old men, of foreign soldiers and officers, of youths, of friars, and of young men in the militia, almost all armed more or less; and the fatal news related in a hundred ways, with divers comments, was in every body's mouth. A deep muttering hum of voices arose, interrupted from time to time, by some voice, louder than the rest, at one time, uttering a prayer, at another blaspheming, or venting an imprecation; and as it happens, on such occasions, the multitude formed themselves in knots around those, who spoke most fluently or most resolutely; and if their measures were different, the object in every case was the same:—to fight and defend themselves.

Beneath the Tetto de Pisani, opposite the Tribune, there was a greater crowd than at any other spot, whose attention was deeply riveted, and the silence quite undisturbed; from the centre of this knot of people, towering above the rest by a whole head, the lofty and venerable form of Niccolo de Lapi was seen; who, with his hand raised, and his eye glancing round with a fearless expression, was saying:—

"Yes, my dear people, the army is utterly routed—Ferruccio is dead—and what then?—Oh! to be sure the Lord's arm is shortened, his hand has lost its strength by the death of one man!—To be sure, the Almighty will be at a loss to find means to help us, He will be sore grieved to have promised us too much!—O ye of little faith!—of little faith!" he repeated more loudly. "Who routs, who gives victory to armies, but God? And since He remains to you, and has sworn to you by the mouth of his prophet, to stand by you, and save you, does the failure of the help of a few men disturb you?—Tell me, how many did God require to slay Sennacherib and all his host? how many to save Bethulia? You trusted in men; know, for once, that in Him, in Him alone ought ye to trust, who has promised to defend you, who has promised (as we all know) even to send his angels to fight for you.* The last extremity of danger was necessary, in order that his glory might appear the more conspicuous! The danger is come, and it is great.—Bow then your heads to the dust!" (and here he and all the people fell on their knees) "O God, let us all cry, O God! O Jesus our King, in Thee alone we trust! It is thine now to confound our enemies, so that they may not reproach us and say:—See how their God helps them!—It is ours to fight, and die; if to die be necessary!—Up then!" he exclaimed, rising up; "up then! to arms, to the conflict! and let us all swear to die a thousand times, rather than to yield once!"

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* Varchi, lib. xi. — "— and to the Piagnoni, who had asserted that Ferruccio was Gideon, and that he must therefore without fail be victorious and deliver Florence, no other hope was now left, but that of angelic aid."

During this address, some raised their hands aloft in the attitude of prayer, some beat their bosoms, some gnashed their teeth, some sobbed aloud; and at the concluding words of the old man, there burst forth, like a clap of thunder, a ferocious and discordant shout of a thousand voices, which repeated the oath proposed to them in a thousand forms; and there followed upon this loud and sudden outburst a deep and prolonged murmur, fraught with angry expressions, threats, and deep mysterious hints; many voices too were heard uttering the words: *Ah! the traitor Malatesta!* and the noise appeared altogether just like that deep and distant rumbling, that is heard among the mountains, after the first burst of the thunder.

Scenes similar to this, which took place beneath the Tetto of the Pisans round Niccolo, were going on in like manner in other parts of the public square, where, on all sides, harangues were being made with a similar object by many of the friars of St. Mark's, and principally by Fojano and Fivizzano; so that, as these popular orators said, scarcely had the noise and uproar ended in one direction, than they began in another. The excitement was still further increased, if it could be, by the following circumstance that took place just at this moment.

A poor child of the lower orders, who, as it afterwards became known, had been left to itself for several months, without any home—its father, a weaver, having been killed in battle, and its mother having died of starvation—had observed, when hard pressed by want, a spot on the side of the Palace, towards the Custom-house, where a gutter ran along near the surface of the ground, proceeding from the kitchens of the Seigniory; and from the pipe having a slight cleft in it, the poor child had noticed some fragments of vegetable refuse, which flowed down this gutter from the washing of the dishes; and exerting himself to enlarge the opening, which he used to cover up as well as he could, so that no one else might see it, and deprive him of this his only and last resource, he came every evening, and found intercepted in some pieces of reed, which he had placed there for that purpose, a small quantity of fruit-rinds, of small bones, of vegetables, and other garbage, with which he sustained his miserable existence. This evening he had come as usual, quite exhausted; for this wretched sustenance only just sufficed to keep him alive. On that day, however, at the Palace, whether owing to the confusion caused by the news that had arrived, or that they had had no time to think about their meals, however it might be, nothing had been thrown down the sink; and the poor orphan, who had scarce a breath of life in him, finding nothing, fell down on his face close to the gutter, and uttered a low and feeble moan; and having no other means of relieving his hunger, he seized some blades of withered grass that grew along by the wall, and thrust them into his mouth; and while he was endeavouring to masticate them with his feeble jaws, he was seen to fall on one side—to stretch his wasted limbs for a moment, and then become motionless.

This circumstance, attracting the attention of some persons, they went up to him, and attempted to raise him from the ground, when they found he was dead. A friar who was passing by bore him off through the midst of the square, at the very moment when the people were roused to the highest pitch by the language of Niccolo and others. The piteous sight of this dead child, carried along in that way, with its arms and legs dangling, its head hanging down, its lips all livid, and stained by the green juice of the grass, which it still held tightly clenched between its teeth, from the convulsions of the death-struggle, deeply affected the hearts of those dejected citizens, who saw, reflected in that poor child, the fate of their children and themselves.

“If one must die in this way,” they all exclaimed, “let us rather die by musket-balls!” “Ah, dog! ah, renegade Clement!” said another; “ah, traitor, assassin of your country!” And Bindo, who was among them, said, in a passionate tone—“But tell me; of all the times that we have gone out to attack the enemy, have we been once beaten, once repulsed? Did we not always retire within the walls at our own pleasure, or (to speak nearer the truth) owing to the fault of that traitor, Malatesta? Eh! let us all vow, that we will go forth to fight, let us settle it amongst ourselves, and then my lords there in the palace must yield to our determination.”

These words, conspiring with many other causes, brought it to pass, that the shouts and uproar of the people, clamorously demanding to be led out to battle, became every moment louder and more terrible; and several, forcing their way up the steps, which rise up beneath the tribune of the palace, showed a disposition to advance, in spite of the guard, in order to go and break in upon the deliberations of the assembled council. They could hear from a distance the rush of the crowd, who were pressing forward on one side, and the wild and disorderly brandishing of the soldiers' spikes, who were trying to keep them back; but with a view to restore some degree of order, a voice was all at once heard among the crowd, announcing, that a resolution had been passed to assault the entrenchments. At these tidings a thousand voices rent the air—*Viva i Signori!*—*Viva il Marzocco!*—and just as in the sea, when the wind falls, the proud waves soon, but not immediately, subside; so, in like manner, the murmurs and agitation of the people lasted for a while; but presently, by little and little, and also because it was now quite night, the crowd dispersed, the hum of voices and the shouts died away, and the citizens retiring in high spirits, and full of new hopes, returned to their homes, leaving the square silent and deserted.

Along with those who bent their steps in the direction of the Mercato Nuovo was Troilus, who was making for the Ponte Vecchio. All this time, whilst we have been attending but little to him or to his affairs, he was attending only too well to the vile business, for which he had come to Florence; and after selling himself to Baccio Valori, though at first he appeared rather indifferent, and disinclined for such services, as we have intimated, partly from some remaining repugnance to such dishonourable practices, partly from his disgust at the life he was condemned to lead, he had gradually divested himself of all scruples, and was bent on well earning the reward of his treachery.

From the roof of Nobili's house, when circumstances required it, he corresponded by signals with those in the camp, by means of linen or cloth flags, by day; and with lights, by night. He had also been engaged in a secret correspondence carried on between Valori and Malatesta, and conveyed the letters in a cross-bow, beyond the gate of San Gallo, where a messenger from the camp came, secretly, at night to fetch them away. Directed by Malatesta, who now reposed entire confidence in him, he had formed an intimacy with the young men in the militia, and with those in particular, who, belonging to the party of Niccolo Capponi, and being of the class of the nobles, united indeed with the rest of the people for the defence, but always cherishing their ancient jealousy of the commonalty, and fearing the government might fall entirely into their hands, furnished a handle to anybody who might be inclined to separate himself from the general welfare; which state of things ultimately produced its natural effects.

Troilus without openly avowing himself, but on the contrary appearing more zealous than the rest for the Piagnone party, had skilfully managed, by throwing out such chance expressions, as irritate minds already excited, to draw them over to views, which he dare not openly propound. Assuming an air of great concern for the welfare of the city, he would sometimes say, hesitatingly and with a sigh: "We shall conquer, to be sure, the siege will be raised, there's not a doubt of it; but then?—" and here he paused; and to those, who pressed him to explain himself, he would add, in a serious tone: "then——God grant this people may not be too much lifted up, may not want too much—may not abuse their victory."

With these and such like insinuations, and also by his being a man of rank himself, he had got into favour with the nobles; and by similar arts, adapted to the various shades of opinion, which divided the people, he was generally well received, and held in great regard by all parties ; and Niccolo himself, in spite of his long experience, and notwithstanding his former suspicions, felt quite satisfied with his conduct, and had full reliance on his honour.

As Troilus had been that evening in the crowd, he had done as others had done, roared and shouted as fervently as the most furious Piagnone; but he had at the same time been attentively watching the actions and countenances of those citizens, who seemed to join in those extravagances, rather to avoid drawing suspicion on themselves, than because they really shared in the general feeling; and when the crowd began to disperse, perceiving a small knot of young men standing apart, among whom was Morticino, Alamanno de Pazzi, Daniel degli Alberti, Giannozzo de Nerli, and many others of the principal men of Florence, just the very class on whom he practised his seductive arts, he approached them, and after some observations, in which he enlarged on the daring enterprise of going out to encounter the enemy, and vowed he would die a thousand deaths for liberty, he dexterously insinuated, that it was more glorious and disinterested for the nobles to embrace this resolution, than for the people; for if they gained the victory, the government fell into the hands of the people; and if they lost it, either the enemy, after taking the city by assault, would sack it, and so the rich lose more than the poor; or, conditions of surrender might be negotiated, and then it would devolve on the rich to pay the tribute, that would doubtless be exacted of the citizens, to punish their obstinate and rash defence; so that in every way, the nobles would be losers, and the people gainers; and he concluded by saying: "So much greater patriotism is it on your part to risk such an encounter!" And these young nobles, conscious that it was all true, and with ruin before their eyes caring little about patriotism, were evidently dissatisfied; and though they said nothing, the thought rankled in their mind; whilst Troilus secretly exulted in the success of his artful insinuations. This is but a sample, but it may suffice to give an idea of the artifices he practised.

Leaving the square then, and directing his steps to the Ponte Vecchio, he went, as it was now night, to Malatesta's palace. The corners of the neighbouring streets, and that through which he had just passed, were guarded by soldiers, who as they knew him, let him pass. Arriving at the gate, which was kept by a strong body of men, he was admitted, and went to Master Barlaam, who was accustomed to introduce him secretly to Malatesta.

Crossing the court, which was illuminated by a number of torches, he saw at the further end, but in such a position, that it could be seen by the passers-by, when the gate was open, an ass skinned and hung up by its hind legs, in the same way as they do calves and bullocks in the shambles. Malatesta wished, by this, to let the people suppose, that he suffered no less than the rest of the inhabitants from the privations occasioned by the siege; and that his food consisted of such vile stuff. How true this was, we shall see presently.

In the Captain General's new quarters, Master Barlaam had his apartments also so situated, that he could always, by certain secret passages, communicate with his master. Here, too, his rooms were on the ground-floor; but not having that convenience for his laboratory, which he had at the Serristori palace, he was still with all his apparatus lying about him, or heaped up in confusion in the corners of the room.

When Troilus entered, he found him engaged in arranging them; and in this service, he was assisted by Selvaggia. They both saluted him with the freedom of intimacy. Since we left Selvaggia on the Empoli road, many months have elapsed, as the reader is aware; and though, during the interval, nothing of importance had happened to her, yet it may be as well, for the better understanding of our narrative, if we say a word or two respecting her.

Master Barlaam, on seeing her re-appear so quickly, and when he little expected it, (for she had come direct to him and dismounted at the gate of Malatesta's palace,) was not a little astonished; and whilst he was in doubt, as to whether she was come to trouble him with fresh demands and new fancies, he was soon made easy by her telling him at once, that she had changed her mind, and that her ideas and wishes had undergone considerable alteration; that she had, at last, discovered how little that contemptible fellow deserved her love, for whom she had undergone so much suffering and hardship; she told him how he had treated her, and of the scornful language she had had to endure from him; and, vowing she would be revenged at any cost, proposed to her father to submit entirely to his wishes, and obey no one but him, provided he would assist her in gratifying the revenge, on which she had set her heart. As she appeared in her demeanour no longer stern and haughty as before, but docile and submissive, like one who had suddenly fallen from the summit of hope; and the old man reflecting, that a resolute spirit like hers might some time or other serve his turn, received her cordially, and told her he was heartily glad that she had at length become reasonable; and as for the gratification of her revenge, that she must give him time to think, and wait her opportunity, and then, in all probability, he would be able to promote her object. Without at present entering further on the subject, and not venturing as yet to trust her discretion, he kept her about him, till, finding her always calm and consistent, and more and more bent upon having her revenge on Lambert, he one day communicated to her, as a good jest, the story he had made up to tell her, the evening when she met Troilus and Benedetto, and informing her of their real name and rank, he added, he wouldn't tell her about it then, for fear of her making it all known to Lambert.

As on several occasions after this, she found herself in company with Troilus, and so they came to know more of each other, they had frequently fallen into conversation about Lambert; and, as Selvaggia displayed very angry feelings in speaking of him, and showed no little inclination to do him a disservice, Troilus, thinking that this circumstance might aid his designs, had fanned the flame of her resentment; considering, that there was no one in the world he could more certainly depend on, to assist him in his schemes, than this offended and angry girl. And receiving from herself, and in part from her father, some account of her past life, and knowing therefore her fearless and terrible nature, he felt quite sure that in such a heart, hatred, and the desire of revenge for her slighted love, must produce their natural effects; and that in his design of wresting Laodamia from Lambert, he could not have found a more efficient ally. He had not indeed, as yet, settled with himself, in what way he would put her services in requisition; but anticipating the end of the siege, and the time when the Lapi family would be ruined, with the rest of their party, he thought to himself:—Oh! some chance or other will turn up! and with two choice spirits, such as Selvaggia and myself, who are eagerly bent on the same thing, it will be mighty strange, if we fail of success!—

"Quick, quick, Master," said Troilus as he entered, without returning his salutation, "conduct me to Malatesta, as great matters are astir, and there's no time to lose."

Barlaam led the way, and as he was leaving the room, he said, turning to Selvaggia: "Do you, too, make yourself quite easy; as, unless a gun-shot makes him toss his arms in the air, in a short time our fine gentleman will be here; and then it'll be our turn, and we shall each have what we want." Saying this, he hurried out without waiting for a reply.

He found Malatesta in a small retiring room, just having finished his evening meal. He was still sitting at table, with the dishes before him, on which were the remains of his repast; and which, judging by the bones, appeared to have consisted of chickens and other birds, certainly not of asses' flesh. Leaning with his elbow on the arm of his chair, his head was bending down; and the light of the lamp, which stood on the table, fell on the polished skin of his head, which reflected its rays, just as if it had been of yellow ivory.

Opposite him, there sat Benedetto de Nobili, and Baccio Valori; for the latter, frequently, during the siege, though with the greatest hazard and difficulty, had contrived to visit him. They all three raised their eyes, as Troilus entered; for they were waiting with no small impatience to hear the latest news; and Malatesta, who affected to appear quite at his ease, although on his brow and in his eye there were traces of uncontrollable restlessness, not without an indication of fear, said, with a forced smile: "You are right welcome! — Come, what say the Piagnoni about their Gideon?"

"They say — they say" — replied Troilus, shaking his head significantly, as much as to say— it's no time for jesting—"they say, they'll do without him—and the devil's in 'em more than ever."

"So let him be," replied Malatesta, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. "Certainly we shall be able to drive this fly off our nose. And how goes it in the public square?"

"Oh! there, a most infernal hubbub; my throat is still sore with shouting—for to play the Piagnone, one wants good lungs and windpipe, I can tell you! But, jesting apart, our old friend Niccolo and the friars, are all preaching away, and he who talks loudest and boldest is most cheered; Savonarola was nothing to them! And the people were all as if they were going to a wedding; shoutings, and cries, and gestures. In fine, had there not got abroad a report, that the authorities in the palace had declared for fighting, I verily believe those incarnate fiends would have torn their lordships to pieces."

"And now?"

"Now, why they are all at home, preparing for to-morrow's amusement."

"Oh! oh! the lion's mane bristles up angrily, —eh? And suppose I am not inclined to make a sally?"

"They would play the very devil with you, I fancy; and force you to it."

"But what if I resign the service, and leave them to manage matters for themselves, with this army hanging on their skirts, which thinks and dreams of nothing else but sack and slaughter?"

"Why, infuriated as they now are, and as I have seen them to-night, I wouldn't swear that they would give you time to finish your words; and would leave their affairs to take care of themselves."

"In that case, they would cut a pretty figure, by the holy rood!"

And the traitor's eye flashed with that diabolical rage, which kindles in a miscreant, when he sees there is a chance of his losing, in a moment, the fruits of long years of villainy.

Upon this Baccio, who had no mind for swaggering, but was filled with apprehensions which he was at no pains to hide, said:

"But the rest, the party of Niccolo Capponi, the nobles, what say they? One would suppose there was no one in Florence but the Piagnoni."

"What do you suppose they say? They say and do as the rest. The man who had ventured to say a word in opposition to the popular feeling to-night, would have been a fool for his pains, and would have had a chance of going home with a stitch in his side. However, even to-night something has been done—so make yourself easy. If I mistake not, when matters come to a push, many standards will waver in the conflict; and many of those, who have their chests well laden with ducats, would rather they were not snapped up by the *Bisogni* and the landsknechts; and therefore they would be for making terms of surrender; and side with my Lord Malatesta, who is for a respectable government, and has several times promised them an oligarchy, which is just what they want.—Is it not so, Signor Malatesta? I fancy the Pope will not be for letting you appear a liar; and will be very happy to grant them an oligarchy."—And he added with a malicious smile: "Nay, to show himself liberal in interpreting the conditions, he will consent, I dare say, that the number of those, entrusted with the government, be as small as possible; and if in that way, it should come down to a single ruler, he'll not be very nice on the point."

CHAPTER XIII.

Not one of the three replied to these ironical jests of Troilus; for those old foxes entertained but little confidence towards one another, and were well aware, that their superiors seldom like their iniquities talked of with so much levity, even among their subordinates, who are charged with the fulfilment of them. So that Baccio, giving a turn to the discourse, observed:

"Well, it's a good job we are rid of Ferruccio; for he was likely to be a thorn in our side. I have sent word concerning the prince's death to his Holiness, who will be sorely grieved, no doubt, for the loss of so valiant a gentleman! but since the will of God, and the chances of war have removed him from this life*—why he will bear his terrible misfortune with resignation, like a holy man, as he is.—But we are not rid of all cause for fear, Sir Malatesta," he said, as it were endeavouring to ingratiate himself; "we must be on the alert, and have our eyes about us. We must mind, now that the Prince is dead, and as our new commander Don Ferrante has but little influence and authority with the Imperialist troops, we must mind, I say, that some devilry or other does not turn up—for upon the slightest pretext, these fellows would rebel, and insist upon storming the city; and were they to succeed, they would treat Florence, as they did Rome three years ago. And if we should deliver Florence, sacked and pillaged, into the hands of his Holiness, you know what sort of thanks we should have.—And it might happen too, that the army, repulsed in the attack, would disband and decamp; which would be still worse; wherefore I would have you think about what I say."

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* To understand Baccio's meaning, it is necessary to mention that there was a suspicion of the prince's having met his death unfairly, and in consequence of directions to that effect, by those who fancied that he was aspiring to make himself master of Florence on his own account.—*Varchi*, lib. xi.

"I suppose you fancy, I don't think about it!" replied Malatesta, peevishly. "Well,—do you, Sir Baccio, return to the camp as quickly as possible, and try to keep the troops quiet, by telling them that they won't hear of surrender in Florence—and so the soldiers will hope for the sack of the city; and as long as they have any hopes of that, they will make no movement. And for these zealots, leave them to me. And you, Troilus and Sir Benedetto, remember that time presses — and that the moment is come, for reaping the fruit of all your toils and dangers. Find out Cencio and the rest, and set them to work, for now's the time to muster those young fellows, who have their chests full of goodly ducats, and have no mind to part with them—

I know what I'm about.—We must trust to them, and no one else. You know what you have to promise them—get them to join me, and place me at their head—eh!" he continued, shaking his head, and smiling, "I have seen many a one cured of this liberty-fever, either by gold,—or the fear of losing it!—But that old fellow Niccolo must be made of different stuff from the rest, by heaven! for they say he has his cellars full of florins, and yet don't care a rush.—Upon him we can't reckon; is 't not so?"

"Oh!" replied Troilus, with the expression of one, who had just heard the most extravagant notion possible; "oh! as for Niccolo, if you have no other candle to go to bed by, you'll go in the dark.—Just fancy; why, it's not even to be thought of!"

Upon hearing of the cellars full of florins, Nobili's mouth quite watered; and, "For the love of God," he said, "I pray there may be no sack!—You remember, Baccio, that you and I have settled all about Niccolo—and since, it seems, matters are now approaching the crisis, I'm glad to remind you of it.—To be plain with you, to do what Malatesta requires, and muster the young sparks at this time—why if there should be the slightest idea of such a thing get wind, our life would pay for it.—I am willing, however, to run the risk; but then, when matters are settled, remember our bargain—"

"Yes, yes; you know I have promised you," said Valori, abruptly; for in his heart, he loathed this avaricious old villain.

"But I," said Troilus, smiling, "don't bargain for money,—I have my eye upon other plunder—when the time arrives, I'll tell you what suits my fancy, Sir Baccio. I won't bother you with it just now, as you have other matters in your head. This only I will just remind you of, that I have passed nine months here, in the midst of sermons and penances, and I look upon you therefore as my debtor."

"Well, well—this is not the time for foolish jests—but I give you my word, I'll not fail in any promise I have made you; and, may be, I shall do more, provided your conduct deserves it."

"Oh!—of that I am quite sure!" replied Troilus. "Now, Benedetto, let us go; as, ere to-morrow, we have many duties to perform, and I would not fail of being at home at the hour of prayer—for I have no mind to go to bed like a dog, as you do, —and besides, it's no bad thing to lay up a store of devotions; for by that means, I shall have enough to last me my life, without having to trouble my head about such matters, when I cease to reside under old Niccolo's roof."

Malatesta got up, and opening a large chest, drew out a bag of money, which he gave into Troilus's hand, saying—"You will give this for me to Cencio, that he may distribute them to the soldiers, so that every one may have his share; and tell him not to let them be without wine—not too much, however—as I don't want to have them drunk. Now get you gone; be prudent and faithful, and you shall not lack your reward. Keep me informed of all that happens; as the success or failure of our enterprise, at this crisis, may depend on a trifle."

Troilus and Benedetto thence descended into the court below, and giving the money to Cencio, departed. After they had proceeded a short distance together, they separated; each going to seek out those, whom they were severally charged to draw over to the side of Malatesta.

Whilst they were occupied with these machinations, Niccolo, who had quitted the public square along with the crowd, had been some time at home. He felt quite knocked up with fatigue and anxiety, and out of heart, in consequence of the deep grief he felt at Ferruccio's death; grief, that he had struggled to keep down before the people, for fear of discouraging them; but which from this very effort, he had felt more keenly within. The unhappy old man entered his chamber, and threw himself into his chair; and with his head resting between his hands, and his mind oppressed with sad forebodings, agitated between hope and fear with regard to Savonarola's predictions, he said not a word, but every now and then sent forth a deep-drawn sigh.

In another part of the room, all by herself, sat poor Laodamia; with her head bent down, and her hands folded on her bosom, she was silently weeping. Her cheeks had lately become wan and pale; for her life of constant agitation, and her being ever in fear lest news should arrive of Lambert's death, was gradually undermining her health. And now, since the sad rout of Ferruccio's army, the particulars of which were not yet known, but in which it was reported, for certain, about 3,000 had fallen, what must it not have been to be left in that terrible state of suspense, as to whether he was alive or dead! To have no means of relieving her mind on that point, no one of whom she could inquire!——"Oh! be sure," she would say, "he would be nowhere, but in the thickest of the fight! He would never be away from Ferruccio's side! Alas!—woe is me! Shall I ever see him again?" And then she would reckon, when he would be likely to come, supposing he were still alive. — Then she would think of the difficulty of getting into the city; of the possibility that he might be alive indeed, but wounded, abandoned and alone, no one could tell where.

All these thoughts were so many red-hot irons, piercing her very heart; and in order to bear up against her intolerable anguish, she would say, trying to light up a ray of hope in her soul: "This evening he may yet arrive——till to-morrow at noon——I will expect him. But if he does not come then?"—And then she would again give vent to her tears; suppressing her sobs, in order not to increase her father's distress, whom she saw, through the mist of her tears, in an attitude of the profoundest grief. And yet at that moment she would have been glad to throw herself at his feet, to embrace him, and to shed, in his bosom, the flood of tears that she was endeavouring to restrain; but Laodamia, on all occasions, thought more of those dear to her, than of herself. All at once however a dreadful thought struck her;—Perhaps he knows for certain, that Lambert is killed!—and cannot bring himself to tell me of it; but wants to break the matter to me by that silence and those deep sighs!—

At this, the poor girl could refrain no longer; throwing herself at her father's feet, sobbing violently, and trembling all over, she said:

"Oh, father dear, he is killed then!—You know it—and won't tell me!—Oh, pray do!—do tell me—and help me to bear this sorrow, too——" But her words were choked by her weeping; she clasped and kissed the old man's hands, who, deeply moved with his daughter's distress, hastened to relieve her mind, assuring her upon his honour that he knew nothing of Lambert, and exhorting her to hope for the best.

Laodamia knew too well the reliance to be placed on Niccolo's word to retain a shadow of a doubt, so that, at once becoming quite composed, and clasping her hands, she raised her tearful eyes to heaven, and, thanking God for this feeble ray of comfort, prayed that He would vouchsafe to her the life and safety of her betrothed husband.

Just then there was a slight noise at the gate; and, in a moment or two, Father Zaccaria, with other friars, entered, and along with them some of the citizens, among whom were two or three of the Priors. They came in very quietly, scarcely saluting those in the room, and sat down, one after another, around Niccolo, with whom they wished to consult about the present state of affairs, to learn what his ideas were, and what counsels they should propound in the Palace; but none of them could bring himself to speak. On every heart, the mournful impression seemed to rest—For us there is no longer anything to hope!—but yet none would allow either himself or anybody else to pronounce their doom irrevocable; they wished to speak hopefully, but they could find no grounds for hope; and so, they remained silent.

At this moment they heard a ringing. Laodamia started; for at every sound, at every voice, she fancied it might be Lambert, and she was in that state of nervous agitation that every trifling sound, that unexpectedly smote upon her ear, made her heart beat violently.

The poor girl bent her ear in a state of trembling anxiety. She heard the gate open.—Who can describe her feelings when she heard, all at once, Mona Fede's voice exclaiming: "Oh, Heaven be praised; you are alive then, Lambert!"

Laodamia attempted to rise and run to the door, but her knees gave way and refused to support her; she fell back again upon her chair, and on her forehead stood that cold, damp dew which precedes fainting. Niccolo and the rest rose up quickly, quite delighted, and at that instant Lambert entered, leaning on the arm of Fanfulla; and as fast as he could—for he appeared to have something the matter with one foot—approaching Laodamia, who raised her lifeless and languid eyes, (at the same time extending her hand towards him,) he said to her, as he grasped her hand: "My dear Laodamia, you see I am indeed come back!" And the warm and passionate tones of the young man's voice, conveyed, much more than the mere words expressed.

In a moment Niccolo and all the rest flocked round him, heartily congratulating him, and thanking God for his safety; and no less warmly did they great Fanfulla, who said to Laodamia, with evident delight: "Did I not tell you, I would bring him back at all hazards?"

"You may say so with truth!" exclaimed Lambert, "for had it not have been for you!——Well, that I am here at all, after God, I owe to you, my good brother!"

"Say nothing about it, my good fellow," replied Fanfulla; "these are the daily occurrences of war; I help you, you help me,—you to-day, and I to-morrow—at all events here we are, still fit for something,—but harkee, mistress Laodamia, don't alarm yourself because he limps a little—it's a mere nothing at all—we'll tell you how it happened by-and-by."

The greetings still went on; and Niccolo, repeatedly embracing Lambert, and the kind-hearted Fanfulla, kept thanking the latter for the service he had rendered them, and which he gathered from Lambert's words, to whom he said: "Amid all my troubles, at least you are spared to me! O Lambert, at what a sad moment is it our lot to meet again!"

The appearance of the two soldiers showed plainly enough, that they had very recently taken part in a fierce and bloody engagement. The armour of Lambert, with its golden stripes, but lately so bright and glittering, was tarnished with rust, and begrimed with mud; of the plumes, which floated in his helmet, there did not remain a single one; and there was scarcely left a vestige of them in the two or three stems, that displayed their broken ends. His left armlet was broken, and only temporarily fastened by a piece of string; on his breast-plate, and other parts of his armour, was to be seen the impress of a hundred blows; and on his right side, the deep indentation of a ball.

Fanfulla, too, was in a sorry plight; his helmet was gone; but instead he wore a hat, beneath which peeped out the ends of a piece of cloth, which was bound round his temples, and the few grey hairs that could be seen, were all besmeared with clotted gore. His accoutrements were all so shattered and damaged, that as he moved, they clattered like a split cane.

Mistress Fede, half grieving at seeing them so wretched in their appearance, half rejoicing that they had escaped safe and sound from so many dangers, had in the meantime hastened to fetch some wine, and to get some clothes for both of them; and she herself set about helping them to disencumber themselves of their armour, along with Maurice, who had arrived with his master in no better plight.

But to the momentary, though most sincere and lively joy, excited by the return of the two soldiers, there soon succeeded, in the hearts of all, the painful and overwhelming thought of Ferruccio's death. A gloomy despondency gradually darkened their countenances, and they relapsed into their former silence; and only while Lambert and Fanfulla were taking off their armour, did they utter some half-broken sentences, expressive of their grief and amazement, coupled with the warmest praises on the terrible affair at Gavinana. When they had almost doffed their armour, Niccolo said, with a sigh, in which his grief seemed tempered by a manly firmness: "Well, since it has so pleased God, let us hear all about it!"—

Lambert thereupon, raising his hands, and striking the palms of them together, exclaimed with a countenance, all glowing with emotion: "Ah! a hero like Ferruccio, there never was, and never will be again in the world!—and our degenerate age was unworthy of such a man.—And to think, that such a noble spirit should have fallen by the hand of that false, dishonoured traitor, Maramaldo! And that we could neither hinder it, nor avenge it!—Ah! but God will certainly do so!—Men will do so, as long as the world lasts, and while valour, patriotism, and honour shall be more valued than cowardice and treachery!"

Having uttered these words with the utmost animation and energy, all at once his countenance changing, he continued with a bitter smile: "Ah, truly, he has great need of my praises!"

Then pausing a moment, as if to collect his ideas, he said in a low and melancholy tone of voice: "Well, this is the history of the affair. You are probably aware, that he was ill and laid up at Pisa, just at the moment, when he received the order to move with his troops on Florence. We lost thirteen days; by which time he was scarcely recovered. And that delay was our ruin! —Well, as Providence would have it, we set out one night by the Luccan gate. There were twenty-five companies of us, about 3,000 infantry, and not quite 500 cavalry; but such troops!—Fanfulla can tell you—troops that—but Gavinana witnessed what troops they were.—Though under Ferruccio, who would not have been a soldier!—as for munitions of war, I'll say nothing; he had provided stores of all sorts; powder, scaling-ladders, equipments, biscuit—there were grenades, muskets with their stands, and a thousand things.—We took the road towards Pescia, and on our march, what order, what discipline was observed! We seemed like a procession of friars!—They talk of the Black Bands!—Fanfulla, you and I have seen them—just tell us, whether they had not reason to envy these troops!"

Fanfulla replied with a movement of his lips, that implied a most decided affirmative.

"Well, as I said, we took the road towards Pescia, and as the inhabitants of that town refused us a passage, we made a *détour* to the Castle of Medicina, where we encamped; and the next day we proceeded to Calamecca. The morning of St. Stephen's day, which was that brave man's last, we ascended the hill, with the intention of marching to Montale. But upon our arriving at Lari those two villains of the Cancellieri party, Captains Pazzaglia and Melocchi—he whom they call the *bravetto*—were sent to him on a mission—which must have been a judgment upon us (for they thought very little about the welfare of Florence, but only of making use of us to ruin the Panciatichi) and they talked him up so finely, that instead of going direct, as I said, to Montale, he was induced to march to San Marcello; and, depend upon it, that those two knavish scoundrels, and no one else, were the cause of our miscarriage; and I will maintain this against all the world. For those furious zealots of Pistoia don't care if the world falls to ruins, if they can but knock out the brains of one of the opposite party; and Ferruccio, (Heaven forgive him!) ought never to have listened to those mad fools.—However, it is not for me to judge that noble-minded man—no doubt he had his reasons.—Sorry that the towns assumed so hostile an attitude, and refused him supplies, he said to Arsoli:—'We shall be obliged at last to levy contributions forcibly upon some township or other!'—But I ought to have told you, that those Cancellieri had promised a reinforcement of a thousand men; but they never made their appearance.—However, to be short, we soon arrived at San Marcello. The inhabitants, seeing the ruin that threatened them, were hurrying, some to remove their goods, others to shut themselves in, and fortify their houses, and many had taken refuge in the belfry-tower. In another direction, going up the hill of Cerreto, was a long line of women, children and old men, who were eagerly escaping from the danger, all with a bundle on their head, carrying their infants, and any household stuff they had been able to lay their hands upon; whilst here and there, some were leading an ass, also laden, a cow, or some other animal; we could see them, every now and then, as they alternately appeared and disappeared to the view among the groups of chestnut-trees; and we could hear even the cries and wailing of the women and children.—And as I followed but a short distance behind those two traitorous Cancellieri, I saw them laughing together, with a savage joy in their eyes, feasting off that mournful spectacle, and constantly urging him to make haste, shouting: 'Quick, quick, that they may not all escape from us!'—Ah! I declare, I know not what good angel held back my hand from cutting them down; for I should have removed a foul blot from God's earth. —And, said I, to think that we are beset with so many enemies, Germans, and Spaniards, and legions of devils, who will make short work with us, God knows! And with whom are we going to contend? with those miserable country-people.—And who are they? Italians.—And who are we? Italians. —Ah! by the great God, who, if he chastises us, 'tis what we richly deserve—and Fanfulla can tell you, that I said to him, at the time:—I like not this beginning, instead of praying to God to give us victory,—to be perpetrating these horrid cruelties and murders!—I assure you, I was only too true a prophet!

"Well, we were no sooner there, than all began, pell mell, from house to house, to break down the doors, and to kill all they could; whilst from the windows the shots came pouring down, and fighting went on everywhere, in the streets, in the interior of the houses, on the stairs, from room to room; for those poor creatures, thinking it vain to look for quarter, determined at least to sell their lives dearly. And those two cursed wretches seemed to have become a hundred; I could not turn my eye in any direction without seeing them, and they perpetrated such atrocities, that I wonder the earth did not open to swallow them up. Oh! I saw Melocchi with these eyes; he had found a child, only a few months old, in the house of some inveterate enemy of his—he came into the public square—he was holding it by the leg—and laughing like a madman; he whirled it round and round two or three times, and then flung it into the midst of a house that was on fire!—I still hear the shrill cry of that poor little child!—O God! O God! and couldst thou give victory to such vile assassins and murderers? Unable to hinder, and unwilling to witness such horrible doings, I quitted the scene, and Fanfulla with me; and we directed our steps to the gate, that leads towards Gavinana, to wait till these horrors should terminate.—All on a sudden, whom do I see? That very Melocchi, who with two more, came running along, and calling to me: 'Come along, quick, let us follow those who are flying yonder, we shall overtake them!'—We approached him like too mastiffs—'Get you gone, you hellish scoundrel!' I said to him; and if he had uttered a word in reply, he would have been a dead man. So he slunk off, and those poor fugitives were able to get safe away.

"But presently their fury was brought to a stop; for the bells of Gavinana were heard violently sounding the alarm; and Ferruccio, inferring the approach of the enemy, began to marshal his troops. He was, with the rest of the officers, in the palace de Mezzalancia, outside of the Pistoian gate; and the tract of land, that stands on an acclivity on the other side of the street, was so crowded with soldiers, that nothing could be seen but a field of iron pikes and helmets.

"The weather was dark and cloudy, and the rain came down in torrents. The troops were ordered to have their rations supplied to them; and the commissary going out, clad in complete armour, except his head, addressed the soldiers, as he only knew how: he then drank some wine; and, as it was still raining, he said in joke:—The weather favours us, and mixes water with our wine, lest we should go to fight with our heads muddled.—That was the last draught he ever drank.

"His white Arab steed was standing ready for him; he mounted it, and with drawn sword, led the advanced guard, consisting of fourteen companies; the rear-guard consisted of fifteen, under the command of Signor Gian Paolo. I was with these last, and accompanied Amico d'Arsoli; Fanfulla was with Ferruccio.

"Meantime news arrived from Gavinana, that the Imperialists were in far greater numbers than ourselves, and that they were led by the prince in person. Fanfulla says, that when Ferruccio heard this, he could not help exclaiming:—

"'Ah, that traitor Malatesta!'—for he could not believe that the prince would leave his camp, under the walls of Florence, so ill-defended, had he not have felt confident, he would not be molested by Malatesta. It is probable, that at this tidings Ferruccio felt doubtful about the fate of the day; but, to all appearances full of courage, he hastened to give battle at Gavinana.

"We, who were with the horsemen of the rear-guard, took a direction somewhat lower down, to the right of the town, in order to encounter the troops under the prince; and advancing with all the speed we could, and in as close ranks as possible (for in these localities to handle the troops, is a difficult matter) we heard musket-shots within the fort, and the uproar of the battle, which was already begun by the commissary. Then we too dashed forward to charge, and crossed the little brook, that runs close by. On the other side, among the chestnut-trees there was some open ground; and here we charged the cavalry of Bicherini, with Herrera and Rosciale and Albanese with his Stradiotes; and scarcely had we been engaged half-an-hour, when, aided by the arquebussiers we had with us, we began to repulse them; and they, their ranks broken, were fast losing ground.

"I don't say it because I was there, but we did our utmost; and Amico, poor old man, fought that day, as if he had been a young man of five-and-twenty. In this way, continually hemming the enemy in, we kept wheeling round toward the walls; and at last, got to the other side of the town, where the Imperialists began to fly in disorder. The prince, observing the bad behaviour of his men, dashed forward in the direction of the fields, called the Virgins; on all sides, from the castle, there rained showers of balls; but he, like a valiant soldier as he was, caring for nothing, rushed forward; and at the very moment that he came up to Masi, waving his sword in his hand, I saw him bend on one side, and the next moment he lay extended on the ground. At first, but few of his men were aware of it, as the smoke entirely obscured their view; but presently, his horse, a beautiful bay, decked in white housings, was seen rushing down the hill, snorting and foaming like a lion, and rapid as lightning, and then disappear amid the foliage of the chestnut-trees, breaking through the boughs or whatever else came in his way. The cowardly knaves were just as if they had seen the devil himself, and instead of rushing forward to revenge his fall, away they went at a break-neck pace towards Pistoia; and we after them. We shouted *Victory!* loud enough to burst our throats, as Ferruccio heard the cries within the fort, and thought he had gained the day.

"Amico d'Arsoli at this moment, in a great hurry, said to me and another, his eyes flashing with joy at our supposed victory:—

"'Quick, back to the Papinian gate; and if the commissary can spare me fifty horsemen, tell him to despatch them to me, to keep in check those who might attempt to go round the walls, and take our men in the rear, whilst I pursue those who are flying.'

"He clapped spurs to his horse, and was off; and we too rode back as he ordered us, like a shot. I plainly saw the importance of dispatch, for I observed, at some distance, several companies of landsknechts, fresh troops, drawn up ready to attack. Whilst we were galloping along these steeps, all at once, it seemed as if the ground gave way beneath me, and my horse and I tumbled over down the declivity, among brakes and briars, till our course was stopped in a hollow; being underneath my horse, I was unable to move; and my right leg, which was pressed under him, I felt all at once warm and moistened; it was blood flowing from my horse, which, having been pierced by a ball, had fallen dead. I could neither move nor help myself; I felt my breath fail me, but could not understand why, as it was only my leg that was caught by the horse in his fall; upon reflecting upon it afterwards, I thought it likely, that in the moment of my fall, there must have passed, within an inch or two of my face, a cannon-ball; and that, you know, is enough to take away one's breath for a time.

"I tried every means to extricate my leg, but all in vain; and there was nothing for it but patience. In the meantime my comrade had ridden up to the commissary, and Fanfulla was ordered to lead fifty horsemen to the spot, where Arsoli had directed. I saw them come on, and draw up in an open space above where I lay, not far from me; they did not see me, for I was buried among the bushes, and call out I could not; I watched them, and had an opportunity of seeing how small account our friend Fanfulla makes of musket-balls. He was on his horse, in front of his men, and I heard him say, when he saw any of his raw recruits shrug their shoulders at the whizzing of the balls—'Courage, my lads; it's nothing at all; those that you hear whizz, are already past:' and standing up in his saddle, he seemed just as if he were drilling his men in a barrack-yard, and not as if he were on a battle-field. At that instant, a shot from an arquebuss grazed his horse's shoulder, and made him start on one side; but he, quite cool and composed, said, while he kept him moving—'When one observes, that his horse is wounded, he must not let him stop; for if he does, he feels the pain more; the injured muscles too become stiff; but keep him moving, and touch him gently with the spur.'"

At this, Fanfulla observed, with a smile—"Why, I saw some fresh lads, who seemed frightened by the whizzing of the balls at their ears, and I wished to let them know they ought not to mind 'em. I have heard a tolerable quantity myself, and yet here I am."

Niccolo and the rest received his remark with a slight smile, and Lambert continued:—"Well, there was no extricating my leg, which now began to pain me considerably; and I felt it becoming quite numbed, and was afraid it was broken. By the time I had sufficiently recovered my breath to be able to call aloud for help, there came at full speed from the direction of Gavinana a cross-bowman, calling Fanfulla and his men back to the aid of the commissary, for those landsknechts, that we had seen a little while before, instead of taking the direction into the valley, had assailed the Pecian gate, and renewed the battle with Ferruccio's men; who were now exhausted by their long contest with Maramaldo's troops, which they had just routed. I saw Fanfulla set off, and was obliged to remain as I was; and a while after, I heard a tremendous shouting in the fort, with such a rapid firing, that it seemed like a continued peal of thunder, and as if the earth was loosening; and I was chafing to think I could take no part in it. About an hour after this, the firing gradually slackened, and at last ceased altogether; and all I heard, was a deep murmuring sound, like the humming noise in a hornets' nest. At nightfall, Fanfulla lighted on me, and rendered me assistance;—he can tell you how matters went within the town, for he saw everything."

"Would to God I had not!" said Fanfulla. "When I was ordered back—ah! mind, I can't discourse like Lambert there, but I will tell you all about it, as well as I can.—When, then, we arrived at the Papinian gate, I ordered every man to dismount. In those narrow, winding streets, better on two legs than on four, say I. Well, then, behold us afoot, our lances pointed, and our ranks in close array. Heaps of slain meet our eyes, blood everywhere running in torrents, like rain in a storm; and from the street, which leads to the Pecian gate, the first company of the landsknechts had already emerged, and the whole street, which is on a slight ascent, resembled a wedge of pikes. On they came like very devils. The commissary, already badly bruised and wounded, what does he do? Most of his troops were killed or wounded.

Is he for surrender? O yes, fancy him doing that! He calls his officers and men about him, forms one line of them, and all altogether, with heads down, they rush into the embattled ranks of the landsknechts! He was himself the foremost in the charge—see you! And when Captain Gorlo wanted to go in front to protect his person, he seized him by the arm, roaring like a wild beast, and forced him back. Eh! I have seen plenty of fighting in my time, and fighting in earnest too; but such a goring as our squadron (for we too had joined our forces to the rest) gave the landsknechts, in all my life these forty years past, by the Virgin, I never saw the like of it before!

"And so with our heads down, and teeth clenched, and scarcely able to see, we plied our daggers and poniards; sometimes too we grasped our adversaries and grappled in deadly strife, now falling, now rising again; and the more we killed, the more there were to rush forward into their places; and I as much expected to escape alive as to be made pope.—But soon our strength failed us, even to stand on our feet, let alone fighting. It was very hot, and our armour appeared like an oven! Just then, I'm told, Orsino, who always kept as Ferruccio's side, and saw that he was exhausted, all covered with dust and perspiration, as he was, and bleeding at every pore, said to him:—'Had we not better surrender, my Lord Commissary?' 'No!' he shouted with a stifled cry; and it seemed as if his strength returned all at once; and he rushed more furiously than ever into the thickest of the enemy, who were beginning to recoil. Fancy us at that moment; we flung ourselves forward like mastiffs; and striking, thrusting, advancing, jumping over dead bodies, and covered with blood, we all at once emerged outside the gate; and finding myself in the open country, I perceived that we had routed the landsknechts; for, to say the truth, in that narrow street, I saw nothing, and knew not where I was; and I felt my head stunned, for I had had a blow on it, and the blood had prevented me from seeing. As soon as we got into open ground, I wiped my eyes a bit, and the enemy's lines opening a little, I saw the commissary being pursued into a small house, near the Chapel of the Virgins; upon which I followed after him and said:—So long as you are for fighting, so am I too.—

"And so once more we renewed the conflict.—But there were now left but a handful of us; and first one, and then another fell, but without yielding an inch of ground. At last, more than a hundred were pressing on us, and they forced us inside by their mere weight, and then hemmed us in; for there were four to every one of us. At this juncture, Ferruccio, who, owing to the loss of blood and his exhaustion from fatigue, had fallen down, and could move neither arms nor legs, and appeared alive only from the flashing of his eyes, and the moans that issued from his bosom, was taken by one Spaniard, and I by another; and so the struggle ended. Only four of us remained alive.

"The Spaniard who took Ferruccio, wanted to secrete him; but an order came from Maramaldo, that he was to be brought to him. They seated him on two cross pikes, and so conveyed him into the public square.

"Maramaldo, after the victory, had retired to a house, by the corner of the church; he came out on the terrace before the door, the ascent to which is by two steps, just as the soldiers, who were carrying the commissary, were mounting them. They flung him down at his feet; he remained in that attitude, but supporting himself on one arm, with brow erect and more haughty than ever."

Here Fanfulla stopped a moment in his recital; but presently, with a serious and mournful visage, (a circumstance somewhat unusual with him) he said, sorrowfully shaking his head: "I would give the little blood, that is still left in my veins, not to have seen what I am now going to tell you!—"

And after another pause, he continued: "Maramaldo came up to him and said:—Thou art there at last, thou rascally shopkeeper, art thou?—But Ferruccio did not let him finish what he was going to say; but told him he lied in his throat; just as if he had been hale and fresh, with his good armour on, and not in that lowly plight; and whilst they were thus reviling each other, I saw Maramaldo, fumbling behind, to find the handle of his poniard, which he unsheathed, and brandished in Ferruccio's face. I watched his eyes; but they quailed not; they never flinched, do you know, as truly as I have to give up my soul to my Maker; and after receiving two stabs in the throat, he said, as he was dying, and whilst the blood was gurgling out of his throat:—'Vile wretch, thou killest a dead man!'—I had had my hands tied by those knaves; or, with nails and teeth, I would have avenged him. And such fellows are called captains of soldiers—eh? Captains of assassins rather, shame on all, who ply the trade! I was conveyed to a house at a little distance, and was recognised by the man who had taken me prisoner; and I, too, recollected him, for we were in Bourbon's army together. He was one Velasco; and he says to me: Who ever would have thought of your being here!—And so we began to chat. To make my story short, he treated me with great kindness, for I said to him:—'Well, what ransom must I pay you? if you were to strip me to the skin, you wouldn't get a ducat out of me.'—However, on account of our old friendship, and because, to say truth, every soldier that has been in the Italian wars these twenty years past, I know them every one, and though not from any deserts on my part, but so it is, they all have a sort of liking for me; and so the upshot was, he let me go. I have promised him indeed, that if I can get together a little money, I'll give him a trifle: but I'm afraid, he'll have to wait a long time for it.

"Then I began to think of Lambert: God

knows how he has fared! thought I.—It was already evening, and the soldiers in the town were bent upon enjoying themselves, drinking and gaming, and pillaging the houses; in fact, what they always do. I stole out very quietly, and resolved to find Lambert, either dead or alive—and I thought of you, Mistress Laodamia.—How will you return to her presence, said I, without him? I began to search among the steeps (it was a clear starlight night); every spot full of the dead and dying; one was bewailing, another blaspheming; another, seeing me pass, was imploring my aid. But what could I do?—I said, Commend yourself to God, good brother,—and passed on; for if I had attended to all, it would have taken me a month. Well, after an hour or two, during which I several times expected, so painful was the wound in my head, and so enfeebled and exhausted did I feel, that I should fall down myself, and never rise again;—well at last, I say, I found my worthy knight down in the hollow, and, thank God, alive.—Let us now mind ourselves, Lambert, said I, for the game is up with us; and I told him the state of affairs. But now, how we succeeded, between us, in moving the dead horse; and then, in getting here, it is of little consequence to tell. At all events here we are, and may I die of a broken neck, if I ever expected to see Florence again."

END OF VOL. II.

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